

A Visual Response to Mass and Social Media's Negative Portrayal
of Mexican Indigenous People: A Cyclical Design Process

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Abstract

Mass media and social media in Mexico have been depicting the visual image of Indigenous people through stereotypes that were established during the Spanish conquest. Not only have these stereotypes shaped the reality of a dominant group over a minority, they have also led to racist and discriminatory practices towards Indigenous people. This thesis creates a cyclical design process based on a practice-lead research and research-lead practice model to conduct a visual exploration. Through a cyclical design process this paper visually examines how the mass and social media in Mexico generates and reinforces stereotypes of Indigenous people. The artifacts designed for this thesis have been created as research pursuits with the intention of encouraging a reflective interaction between the audience and graphic design.

Dedication

Esta tesis está dedicada a mis padres Gabriela Gamboa García y Everardo Mota Guzman y a mi hermana Griselda Mota Gamboa (mi princesa). Gracias por su apoyo incondicional a cada uno de mi sueños, por su amor eterno paciencia y por motivarme en cada paso que doy. Sin ustedes esto no sería posible. Los amo infinitamente gracias.

"Por mi raza hablará el espíritu."

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Key Terms

Term

Definition

Indio (Spanish)

Term used to refer to an individual who belongs to an Indigenous community in Mexico. Spaniards started using this derogatory term to refer to Indigenous people and as a way to have a unified definition of them instead of calling them by their community name. It is an offensive, racist, and discriminatory term that diminishes Indigenous people.

Naco (Spanish)

Derogatory label referring to an individual of brown skin color or an Indigenous phenotype.

Criollo (Spanish)

Term used to refer to a person born in Latin America and of pure Spanish descent.

Mestizo (Spanish)

Term used to refer to a person of Spaniard and Indigenous mix (the majority of Mexican society).

Güero (Spanish)	Term used to refer to a person who is white, i.e., to flatter someone.
Stereotype	A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.
Practice- lead research	A conceptual framework that allows the practitioner to include a creative process, methods, and techniques as a way to obtain research-based knowledge from it.
Mass media	Sources of information and news such as newspapers, television, radio and the Internet, that reach and influence large numbers of people. (Oxford Lexicon, 2020)
Social media	Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. (Oxford Lexicon, 2020)

Introduction

As a Mexican designer I am personally familiar with the marginalization and stigmatization experienced by Indigenous people in Mexico, as well as the exposition of how mass and social media negatively portray Indigenous people. This thesis investigates stereotypes deployed by the mass and social media against Indigenous people in Mexico, bringing to light the racism and discrimination engendered by the use of such stereotypes. Through a cyclical design process this thesis seeks to collect, analyze, visually respond, and further critique the visual language used by the media when representing Indigenous people.

In contemporary Mexico, the mass media distributes stereotypes through the mockery of Indigenous people which generates a racist and discriminatory discourse, a practice which continues to be under-recognized by mainstream Mexican society. This mockery has also become present in social media through the spreading, creating, and distribution of content which contributes to this harmful representation. In response to these issues a range of visual explorations were created throughout the course of this thesis. The explorations take form of design artifacts, functioning as active objects which are reconsidered and analyzed in an attempt to identify and make visible this underlying societal problem. The design model in this study works in a cycle by going backward and forward between visual explorations and academic research to challenge stereotypes—the racist and discriminatory discourse against Indigenous people which has been generated, reinforced, and shared by the mass and social media.

1 Contextual Background

1.1. Indigenous communities in Mexico

According to the second article in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States “The nation is multicultural, based originally on its Indigenous peoples, described as descendants of those inhabiting the country before colonization and that preserve their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, or some of them” (UNAM, n.d.). Mexico’s cultural diversity is represented by 68 different Indigenous communities, their 68 languages, and their various linguistic derivations (CDI, 2014).

Mexican society socially accepts, and even lauds, the idea of the ancient Mesoamerican Indigenous people who are depicted archaeologically and historically as founders of Mesoamerican cultures (i.e., Mayans, Aztecs, Olmecs), playing a major role in establishing the nation. Nevertheless, this same society rejects the historical notions embodied by modern Indigenous people, a notion that has become synonymous with marginalization, poverty, and a lack of rights. This approach leads to a public representation reinforced by the mass and social media which pushes the falsity of Indigenous people in Mexico as being passive, indifferent, or lazy. This marginalizing contribution delivered by the mass and social media results in a negative bias of the Indigenous identity which has become widespread across modern Mexican society. In order to understand the diverse origins of mainstream Mexican society, Indigenous people, and the stereotypes and racism directed toward Indigenous people in Mexico, it is essential to review the historical background of Mexican society.

1.2. The colonial origins of the stereotypes and social division in Mexico

The Spanish conquest of Mexico occurred between 1517 and 1521, bringing with it the confrontation of two worldviews: the European (Christian, monotheistic) and the Indigenous (pagan, polytheistic) (López de Gómara, 2007). The most fundamental impact of the Spanish conquest on Mexican society was the clear societal division between Spaniards (the colonizers) and Indigenous people (the colonized). The relationship between these two groups was not egalitarian; rather, it involved the domination of one group over the other. After the Spanish conquest, Indigenous people were called *indios*, a derogatory term used to denote an inferior condition. The term *indio* was used to refer to all Indigenous communities, and thus, the social and cultural differences between these communities were overlooked and homogenized.

This categorization implied that every Indigenous person stood in an inferior position to Caucasian Europeans. However, Indigenous people were not only divided from Europeans in terms of social class, they were also physically segregated and prohibited from living in the same places as Spaniards; as developing land and the city was reserved for the settlers. This divisiveness and segregation continues to exist in contemporary Mexican society. The dominant groups and elites are those who embody privilege, acting as an ideal apex point of reference to define the identities of inferior groups.

It was important for the Spaniards to make a clear distinction between themselves and the Indigenous people. This distinction was essential in maintaining dominance, and it allowed them to determine how those of lesser power should act and live. This colonial division brought with it racist and discriminatory practices, which persist to the present day. During Spanish colonization Mexico had a racial caste system consisting of three main races. The races include: Europeans (Spaniards), Indigenous Mexicans, and the Spaniard's African slaves. The racial caste system was instigated by the Spaniards forceful self-proclaimed sociopolitical power, denoting all other races inhabiting the land as having a status lower in the social hierarchy. Many racial combinations were conceived at

the time of colonization, and three primaries include: *Criollos* (Spaniards born in Mexico), *Mestizo* (a mix between Spaniards and Indigenous people), and *Mulatos* (a mix between Spaniards and Africans) (Darío, 2017).

This social system used skin colour to develop a superficial racial hierarchy which placed Indigenous Mexicans in a position of inferiority. The low status of Indigenous Mexicans which was proclaimed during colonization has undergone little change up to the present day. In present day Mexican society, people continue to reinforce the established racial practice by refusing to accept that they themselves have a pedigree of Indigenous roots embedded within them. By not accepting their Indigenous lineage, they are also tainted with stereotypes about Indigenous people. According to a study by the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (CDI, 2006), in Mexican society, the main stereotypes about Indigenous people involve views of the latter as poor, lazy, primitive, and uneducated. It is problematic that after five centuries Mexican society continues to uphold the same stereotypes that began with the Spaniards colonization.

2 Stereotypes

The term “stereotype” was first coined by Walter Lippmann in 1922, who described it as “pictures in our heads” that we use to apprehend the world around us (Seiter, 1986). The American psychologist Gordon Allport describes stereotypes as exaggerated beliefs associated with a particular category (Brink & Nel, 2015). Allport states that the function of a stereotype is to categorize in order to justify conduct in relation to that category. These categories can be defined by different social groups, and once the categorization of a group is created, a set of perceptions about that group is conceived. The dominant group in Mexican society categorizes Indigenous people by their economy, education, and traditions which are deemed as archaic in relation to a contemporary lifestyle. Dominant groups create perceptions of the Indigenous minority, perceptions which are representative of a false reality that become propagated and strengthened in depictions distributed by the mass and social media.

2.1 Stereotypes within the media

The mass media often uses stereotypes to create negative representations of particular social groups. According to Seiter (1986), most of the information used to construct stereotypes does not come from personal experiences, but rather originates from the media: “it is commonplace that the mass media is populated with stereotypes” (Seiter, 1986, p. 14). The principal concern about stereotyping is that it can lead to racist and discriminatory practices. Cooke-Jackson and Hansen (2008) state that stereotypes are problematic because they poorly represent and assign the wrong characteristics to minority groups: “stereotypes usually fail to reflect the richness of the subculture and ignore the realities from which images come” (Cooke-Jackson & Hansen, 2008, p. 186). According to Dixon (2000) such as *The Cosby Show*, it can reasonably be argued that television still frequently portrays Blacks in a stereotypical manner (Dates & Barlow,

1990; Evuleocha & Ugbah, 1989; Graves, 1993), the media functions as a sociocultural agent which provides information leading to the creation of stereotypes. The media can have a major impact on society by contributing to the conceptions of a person's perceived reality.

2.2 Cultivation theory in the generation and reinforcement of stereotypes within the media

Cultivation theory was first developed by George Gerbner as a theoretical means of exploring the sociocultural role that the media plays in shaping beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the world (Shrum, 2017). This theory has three components: (1) media institutions (in this study, this includes film productions, marketing campaigns, and social media); (2) message production; and (3) message effects (in this case, the effects of stereotypical representations in relation to audience understanding) (Shrum, 2017).

Stereotypes are uninformed perceptions and opinions that people have about other individuals or groups. According to Fujioka (1999), "television may become part of our social experience and serve as a basis for social judgments such as racial attitudes and ethnic stereotypes." (Fujioka, 1999, p. 52) Therefore, it can be understood that the media contributes to the construction of people's reality in their perceptions of Indigenous people.

Fujioka explains that Sigelman and Welch (2017) speculate about the mass media's role in the development of racial attitudes. They argue that the development of racial attitudes is more effective when there is no personal contact with the race in question. Thus, the majority of Mexican society that adheres to stereotypical perceptions created by the mass and social media in regard to Indigenous people may not be in contact with or have any accurate knowledge of the stereotyped.

There are two primary concepts of note that lay within cultivation theory: mainstreaming and resonance. Mainstreaming refers to a shared perception of the reality within a dominant group, among other disparate groups (Shrum, 2017). In relation to this thesis the dominant class of Mexico's society is more affluent with privileged education, they share similar beliefs and perceptions of reality. The other important concept, resonance, "posits that viewers whose life experiences are congruent with TV portrayals will be the most affected by TV viewing" (Shrum, 2017, p. 5). In this study, Indigenous people are a minority group who become affected negatively by their group's misrepresentation in the media, this can lead to an uncertain self-perception of identity. If the media portrays Indigenous people as poor, illiterate, lazy, ugly, primitive, and naïve, this will affect the perception of Indigenous people by the dominant group which, as previously mentioned, does not have firsthand knowledge or contact with Indigenous people. Resonance thus identifies that mass media holds power in the ability to affect and shape people's perceptions and understandings of Indigenous people in Mexico. Although cultivation theory was originally developed in reference to the medium of television, it has also been applied to social media, "whatever is shared on social media platforms forms an opinion and might end up with a judgment" (Nevzat, 2018, p. 1).

The foundation of cultivation theory is the recognition of how reality perceptions can change according to what is portrayed in the mass media, specifically televised media. However, people may be spending more time using the Internet than watching television; their perceptions are also shaped by the content they are exposed to on social media. Their perception is being formed by more than just consumption, participants become users through their production of content such as: images, videos and texts. Users are then contributors to the reinforcement of stereotypes which continue to marginalize Indigenous people. The content produced by users becomes shared and mass produced, being distributed indirectly over the vast networks. "The new media enables the audience to be active participants of, and contributors to media and this interactivity creates reciprocity between the media producer, distributor and the consumer" (Nevzat, 2018, p. 2). By being active participants the audience shapes their own reality and shares

this reality with others, allowing the dominant group to control when and how this reality is shared. This can lead to the assumption of a socially constructed reality which reinforces the stereotypes mentioned earlier. These stereotypes can be cemented by humorous memes, posts, tweets, or videos, allowing for false perceptions of reality to be understood more so than the true nature of Indigenous people.

Social media content may also be shared among non-Indigenous identifying Mexicans, making visible that they refuse to see Indigenous people beyond superficial stereotypes. A consciousness of the ramifications these comments have over the public perception of Indigenous people does not seem to be present in Mexican society. Social media works as a variety of platforms where users can express themselves freely in a public virtual landscape, but some of the shared “funny” posts, comments, and tweets contain a voice of racism which normalizes racist behavior without considering the discriminatory undertones.

2.3 How the mass media portrays Indigenous people in Mexico

This chapter makes visible some examples of how films and advertising campaigns have presented and portrayed stereotypes of Indigenous people in Mexico. The collected series of examples finds their roots in stereotypes established by Spaniards more than 500 years ago, persisting through to contemporary times.

In 2015 Coca-Cola released an advertisement that highlighted the discrimination experienced by Mexican Indigenous communities. The advertisement showed a group of caucasian, seemingly well-off youth going to the town of Totontepec in Oaxaca, home of the Indigenous Mixe community. Once there, they built a Christmas tree while sharing a cooler full of soft drinks under the slogan, “let’s stay together.” This advertisement reinforces the stereotype of Indigenous people as being naïve: Caucasian people bring with them Coca-Cola bottles and a good spirit in an attempt to “modernize” the

Indigenous Mixe community; an audience portrayed as being in awe of the Caucasians (Alianza por la salud alimentaria, 2015). The message being shared in this advertisement is racist and discriminatory because Coca-Cola depicts Indigenous people as passive and subordinate to the dominant group who are representative of “happiness” and “modernity”, implying that the Mixe community lacks these traits.

Historian and anthropologist Ricardo Pérez-Montfort (2010) has addressed how the mass media in Mexico, particularly radio and cinema, contributes to the representation and portrayal of Indigenous stereotypes. Pérez-Montfort found that the medium of film continues to portray stereotypes of Indigenous people which were established at the time of Spanish colonization over 500 years ago. Anthropology professor and researcher Francisco de la Peña (2015), who has focused more so on cinema, conducted a cinematographic analysis which found that the Indigenous people of Mexico are commonly portrayed in this medium as savages and passive. Peña makes note of the following films, he discusses *Tizoc: Indian Love* (1956) by Ismael Rodríguez, in which the protagonist is a naïve Indigenous person who is in love with a white woman. The film *Maria Candelaria* (1943) explores the submissiveness of Indigenous women. *Macario* (1960) features an Indigenous man who lives in a superstitious and magical world, representing how colonizers perceived the Indigenous world as pagan. *Anima Trujano* (1961) depicts an Indigenous man who is unable to speak and grunts to communicate with others, highlighting that non-Spanish speaking Indigenous people are perceived as savage and illiterate. These films not only propagate and strengthen the stereotypes; they also create a biased view that will be reinforced in future media.

Despite the fact that the Mexican media sometimes portrays Indigenous people in a historically exalted and idealized way, they are generally mocked and funneled into the realm of comedy to make people laugh. There is a famous Indigenous character that appears in a range of movies in Mexico called *La India Maria* -The Indigenous Maria, who is used to humorously portray the stereotypes which shape viewers' perceptions of Indigenous people. Maria is an Indigenous woman who is not fluent in Spanish. She is

a *Mazabua* speaker, and thus, people cannot communicate with her. She always wears traditional Indigenous attire reinforcing the stereotype that Indigenous people are traditional and not modern. In addition, her physical appearance is depicted by having “typical Indigenous facial features.” She is portrayed as dumb and inferior to others (Pineda-dawe, 2012). Mockery is used as a cover for racism, and this character does not help with the construction of a positive image of Indigenous people. Her role solidifies the assumption that the jocular use of stereotypes is not a form of racism simply because it can generate a comedic response. The aforementioned movies use a discriminatory humor that endorses, fortifies, and reinforces stereotypes in reference to Indigenous visual appearance, language and education, diminishing a public understanding of the rich and diverse range of Indigenous identities.

3 Mock-Spanish

Mock-Spanish is a term coined by Jan Hill in 1996, which she identifies as a “covert racist discourse” whereby mass media linguistic representations of minority languages and language diversity in the USA serve to mock a language, essentially functioning as an “elevation of the whiteness” (Hill, 1995, p. 638). This discourse demeans minority languages, in this case Spanish, contributing to the formulation and reinforcement of stereotypes. Hill labelled Mock-Spanish as a “covert racist discourse” since “it accomplishes racialization of its subordinate group targets through indirect indexicality, messages that must be available for comprehension but are never acknowledged by speakers” (Hill, 1995, p.638). Mock-Spanish can then be understood as a covert practice which discreetly stereotypes minorities. According to Hill, in order to create Mock-Spanish, interlocutors must have access to and be familiarized with the language and its stereotypes.

Hill (1995) states that Mock-Spanish is a system composed of four major strategies to “include” Spanish language or words into English communication:

- (1): ‘semantic derogation’: the borrowing of neutral or positive Spanish loan words which function in Mock-Spanish in a jocular and/or pejorative sense,
 - (2) ‘euphemism’: the borrowing of negative, including scatological and obscene, Spanish words, as euphemisms for English words, or for use in their own right as jocular and/or pejorative expressions,
 - (3) ‘affixing’: the borrowing of Spanish morphological elements, especially -el ‘the’ and the suffix -o, in order to make an English word especially jocular and/or pejorative, and
 - (4) ‘hyperanglicization’: absurd mis-pronunciations, that endow commonplace Spanish words or expressions with a jocular and/or pejorative sense and can create vulgar puns.
- (Hill, 1995)

4 Mock-*Nahuatl*

Mock-*Nahuatl* is a linguistic concept generated during this thesis and is a form of Indigenous Mock Language which finds common use in Mexican memes. This concept refers to how Mock-Spanish can be applied to Indigenous language. Although *Nahuatl* is one of the most widely recognized Indigenous Mexican dialects, there seems to be a general ignorance toward understanding that this language was once the most powerful, significant, and distinguished languages spoken before the Spanish conquest, not to mention its contribution to contemporary Mexican lexicons. It is important to highlight some structures of this dialect to understand how it is used to mock by interlocutors or the dominant group. Nouns are determined in *Nahuatl* through the use of four bound suffix morphemes: (-tl), (-tli), (-li), and (-in). These morphemes are always applied to the singular form of a noun and complement singular verbs. They signify the augmentative or diminutive and convert verbs into nouns (Hasler, 2011). With this information Mock-Spanish can then be used as a reference and example in the understanding and generation of the term Mock-*Nahuatl*, which commonly involves the use of a word with the suffix -tl, -tli or li, (i.e., ok will be *oktl*, just do it will be just do *itl*).

Comparing the use of Mock-Spanish with Mock-*Nahuatl* exposes some of their similarities. First, *Nahuatl* is an Indigenous language in Mexico considered to be a minority voice in Mexican society. Indigenous people are stigmatized and discriminated against when they use their own language, similar to individuals who denounce those who speak Spanish instead of English in the United States. *Nahuatl* is considered one of the most recognizable dialects in Mexico and although it has made lexical contributions to everyday linguistic interactions in Mexico, it remains a target of prejudice. Secondly, interlocutors have made use of Mock -*Nahuatl* to reinforce Indigenous stereotypes. Finally, of all three variations of *Nahua* in Mexico, interlocutors refer to the most well-known dialect, *Nahuatl*, the language of the Aztecs.

According to Hill (1995), one of the strategies used to ‘incorporate’ Spanish, in this case *Nahuatl*, into English materials is by “affixing”; the borrowing of Spanish morphological elements, especially the suffixes -el “the” and -o “o”, in order to make an English word especially jocular and/or pejorative (Hill, 1995). An example of this affixing can be seen in the Spanish interlocutors cross-language use of the *Nahuatl* noun suffix termination “tl.” Interlocutors take the morphological elements of *Nahuatl* and add them as a termination to any word (English, Spanish, or a mix) for discriminatory parody purposes. Mock-*Nahuatl* can be understood as a tool used for the purposes of “humor” that contributes to the diminishment and stigmatization of minorities by a “superior” group. It is paradoxical to think that Mexican society is doing this in the medium of memes within their own culture.

5 Methodology

This chapter discusses a model called *The Iterative Cyclic Web* by Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean, and a cyclical design process which was used to structure my process of visual exploration. *The Iterative Cyclic Web* combines practice-led research, research-led practice, creative practice, and academic research. This model was used as a foundational method which was re-structured to suit the pursuits of this thesis, resulting in the formulation of a cyclical design process.

5.1 The Iterative Cycle Web Model

According to this model, there are two intertwined concepts: practice-led research and research-led practice. The term practice-led research alludes to a produced artifact itself as a form of research and the creation of the artifact as evoking research insights. Research-led practice, according to the authors, is used as a complement of practice-led research. This term proposes that academic research can lead to creative outputs. This term emphasizes the insights, concepts and theories which can emerge when reflecting on the production and final outcome of an artifact (Smith & Dean, 2009). The Iterative Cycle Web Model accommodates practice-led research which encompasses the creative practice and research-led practice which involves the academic research.

In reference to Figure 1.1 Smith and Dean describe this model as relational:

“The structure of the model combines a cycle and several subcycles (demonstrated by the larger circle and smaller ovoids) with a web (the criss-cross, branching lines across the circle) created by many points of entry and transition within the cycle. The outer circle of the diagram consists of various stages in the cycle of practice-led

research and research-led practice, and the smaller circles indicate the way in which any stage in the process involves iteration. The right-hand side of the circle is more concerned with practice-led research, the left-hand side with research-led practice, and it is possible to traverse the cycle clockwise or anti-clockwise as well as to pass transversely". (Smith & Dean, 2009, p.19)

The relationships between the various activities described by Smith and Dean have been used as a template for a cyclical design process which structured the creative research of this thesis. The Iterative Cycle Web Model was selected due to its cyclical characteristics, stress on iteration, and the combination of practice-led research and research-led practice. Practice-led research highlights the design process and research-led practice accentuates the concept insights, theories, and other academic research.

According to art professor Brad Haseman, artwork produced embodies research findings which are expressed in a symbolical manner (Haseman, 2006). Artifacts created in this manner embody the research and visually express these ideas through the making of form. The research generated from the creative practice is the visual output as the artifact embodies the research and at the same time the piece becomes the research itself.

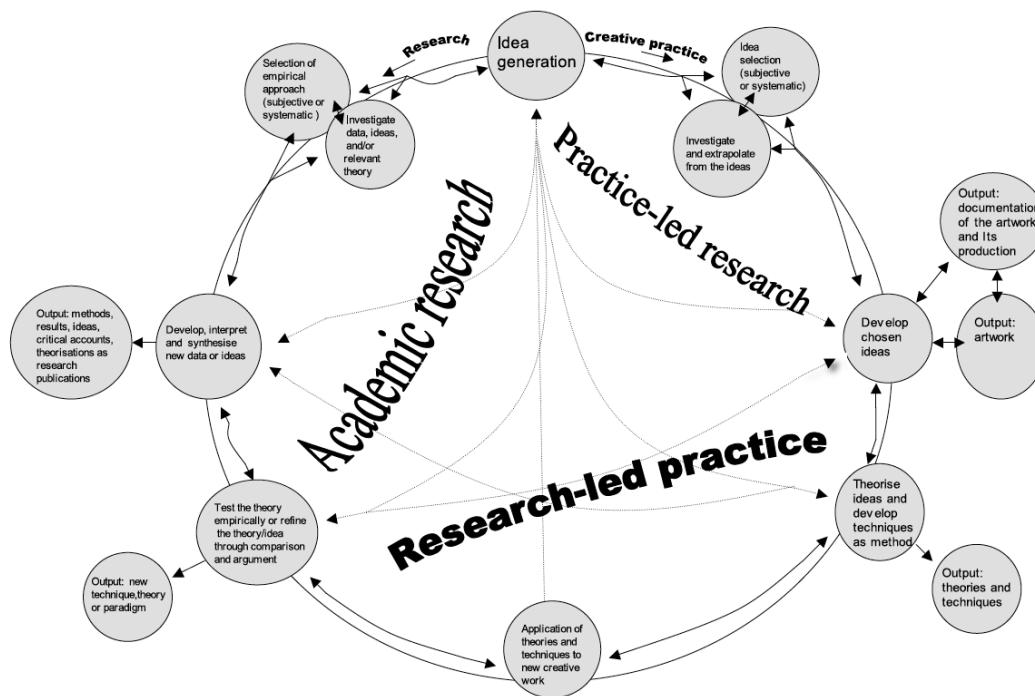


Fig. 1. A model of creative arts and research processes: the iterative cyclic web of practice-led research and research-led practice (Smith & Dean, 2009, p.20)

5.2 Cyclical Design Process

The following design process, depicted in Figure 2, is a combination of research and practice which was used as a directional reference for all of the visual projects produced for this thesis. This cyclical design process can be broken down into 8 stages. When instigating the development of the thesis projects this model was used rotating counterclockwise, starting with data collection.

The cyclical design process was developed to be conducted in eight stages: Stage (1) consisted of data collection, a process initiated by the identifying and acquiring of images and video materials from mass and social media sources. Selection criteria was defined based on the research focus of the project. The data collection methods will be discussed in further detail later in regard to each individual project. Stages (2) and (3) involved analyzing the data collected through academic and theoretical research information from outside the field of design. Stage (4) consisted of formulating new questions and concepts to inform further visual explorations. Stages (5) and (6) made use of practice-led research. These stages involved the generation of visual concepts and output of projects which were based on the questions and concepts previously obtained in stage (4). Stage (7) is where the practitioner self-critiques the produced artifacts to reflect on the knowledge obtained, risks, success, failures, or limits of the design output. This self-critique was important, not only to understand the research obtained but to be conscious of the knowledge produced as a designer. Stage (8) prompted new questions, concepts and insights as a result of the self-critiques and was crucial for the sequencing and further project production. This was an ongoing process where creative practices and theoretical research worked together to interrogate a social problem through visual and academic strategies.

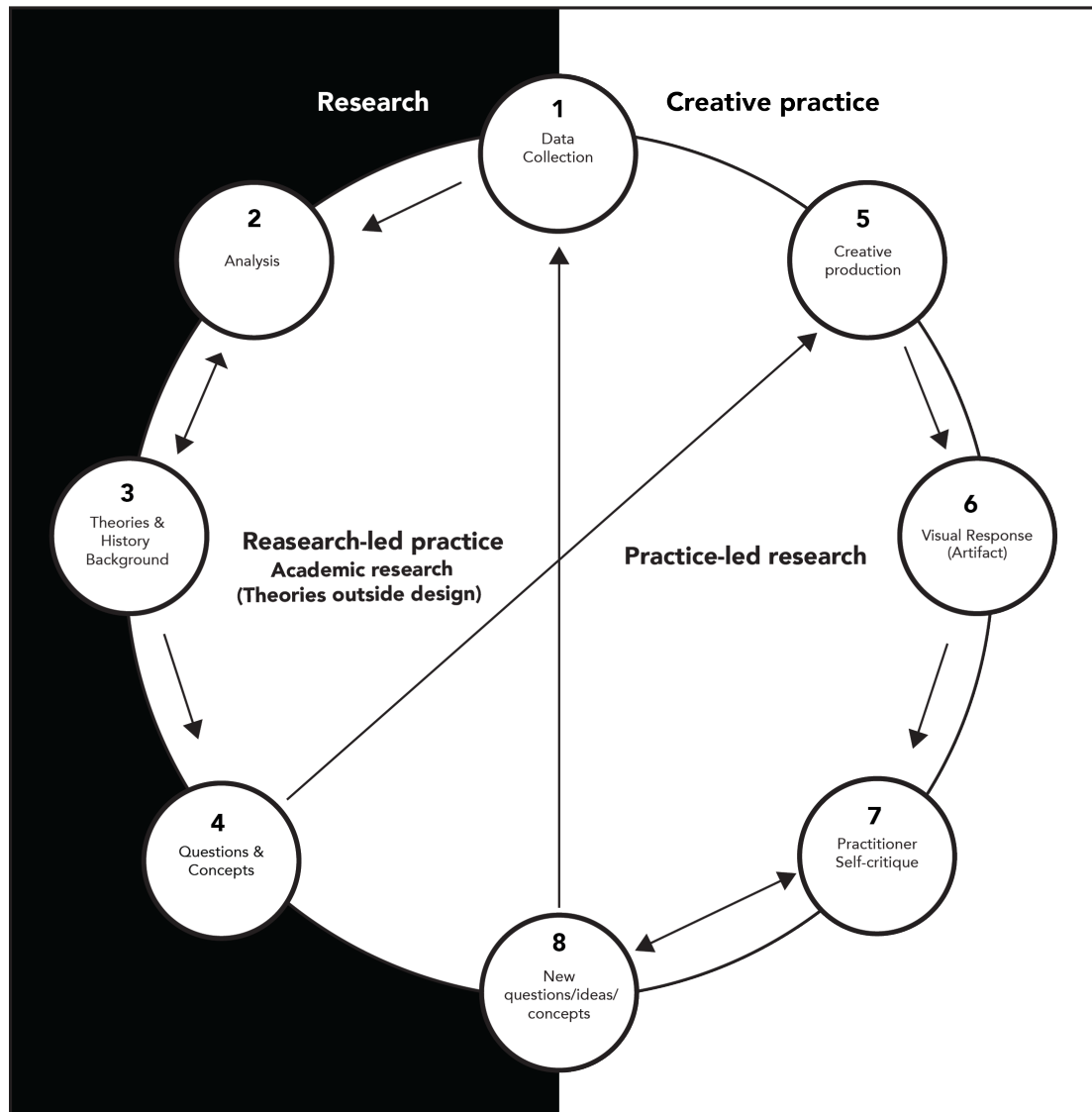


Fig. 2 Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Cyclical Design Process*, 2020

6 Visual Artifacts

This chapter examines the visual work produced for this thesis and showcases how the customized cyclical design process was used to create new visuals and generate research explorations. These projects visually respond to and re-purpose the data collected as a means to interrogate the representation of Indigenous people by mass and social media in Mexico. There are seven projects in total. The sequencing of these projects is crucial, meaning that the reflective insights obtained from one project result in a direct influence on the creation of the following project. New understandings of the social problem are discovered and further explored within this cyclical design process.

6.1 Project 1: Multiculturalism Highlighting Diversity in Mexico

This project aims to explore the cultural diversity that exists in Mexico. Research for this project was initiated from data derived from secondary sources in the form of surveys conducted in Mexico. The survey data provided information on the number of Indigenous communities in Mexico and the general knowledge inhabitants know about these communities. The surveys collected show that, according to the *Special Program of Indigenous Peoples 2014-2018*, there are 68 Indigenous communities and 68 languages, each with their own respective linguistic variants. As such, Mexico is recognized as a multicultural nation (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de Pueblos Indígenas (CDI), 2014), a designation to which Mexican society is not necessarily aware. A study conducted by The National Institute of Indigenous Peoples shows that the general population of Mexico is only aware of 14 out of the 68 communities. According to this study, the monumental lack of knowledge regarding Indigenous themes is generally surprising, which results in misguided perceptions surrounded by myths, vagueness, and stereotypes (CDI, 2006). This project makes use of images collected which depict Indigenous people in movies, television shows, mass media, and social media. Narrowing

down the data collection for this project, I sorted and selected pictures of five different Indigenous communities (*Purepecha, Pame, Raramuri, Seri, and Wixari*). The collected images were from online government publications, online newspapers from each region, Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter accounts that support Indigenous activities, tourism, and traveler blog posts.

Analyzing the data collected, this project revealed that Mexico is a rich and culturally diverse country. In addition, it exposed the misinformation that Mexican society has regarding Indigenous communities. Misinformation is a major device used to generate and normalize stereotypes about a particular group. This misinformation leads the audience to believe whatever the mass media shares and therefore influences their perception towards Indigenous people. As discussed in Chapter 2.2, cultivation theory states that people's perception is shaped by the mass media content to which they are exposed.

The visual data collected portrays Indigenous communities as either selling their arts and crafts on the street, in the fields, or wearing traditional attire (refer to Section 2.3). This visual portrayal of Indigenous people categorizes them into one group which is derogatorily called "*Indio*". This label diminishes the Indigenous people, relegating their rich and diverse culture. Through the widespread distribution of images referring to the "*Indio*" category, a common practice develops in people making a mental association between media portrayal and personal classification; formulating the stereotype.

Upon analysis, this data visually represents the richness of each community through color, showing that they are unique and different from one another, not belonging to a single collective category. I carefully curated a collection of images from the *Purepecha, Pame, Raramuri, Seri, and Wixari* communities, categorized them by community, and later combined each stack of pictures to discern the main colors of each community. The resulting color variation originates from the attire of each community. Indigenous attire plays a significant role in the identity of each community and represents their cultural

traditions. The visuals created include six posters, the first five use colours sourced from Indigenous attires which contribute to highlighting the richness of each community (Fig. 3,4,5,6 & 7). The sixth poster is a 72-inch print that shows the five communities coexisting together (Fig. 8). This represents five communities coexisting in one space and the notion that it is possible to appreciate the diversity and richness of each community separately.

Upon reflection on this work, this project revealed that although the color was an important aspect of this piece, there is a limitation in terms of the colors that represent each community, even though the colors on the poster come primarily from their attire. I have a limited understanding of each community and I do not know how they would perceive themselves through color. Despite this lack, the cyclical design process allowed me to explore freely without graphic limitations. Mexico is known as a colourful country and this project allowed me to understand where all this colour may originate. As a practitioner, this project helped me to develop an understanding of how the process of making can impact idea generation and how this facilitates in-depth research, and vice versa. The project also allowed me to acknowledge the importance of understanding the cultural diversity among Indigenous communities in Mexico and not to disseminate, generate, or reinforce stereotypes. Adhering to the cyclical design methodology, this project results in a calling for further investigation regarding these stereotypes and additional academic research that connects to this line of inquiry. As a result of this project, new questions arose, such as: Where do the origins of the media's conception of Indigenous people lie? How do ancient Indigenous people perceive themselves? How do ancient Indigenous people embrace their culture? I will explore these questions in future projects.

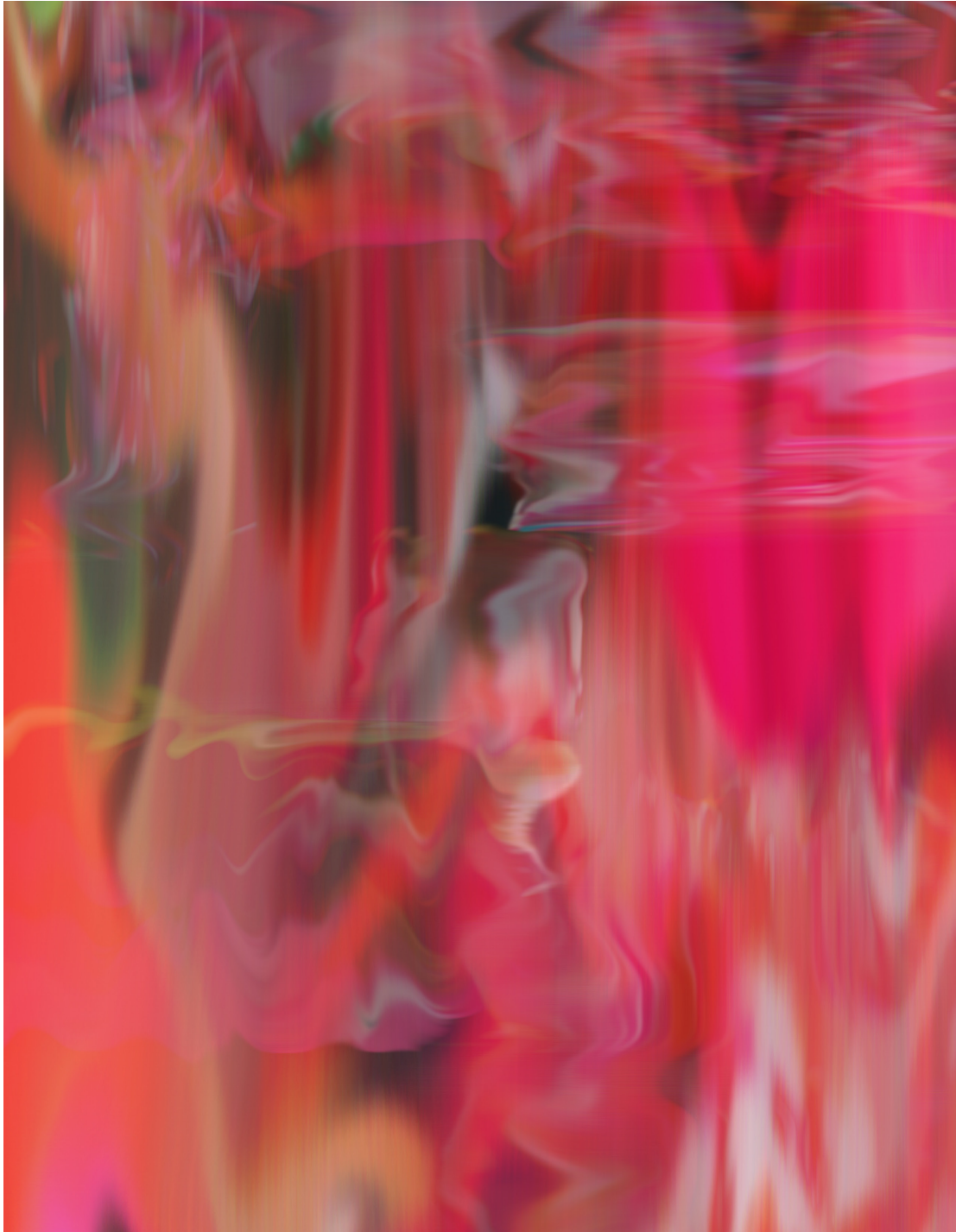


Fig. 3. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Pame*, - Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

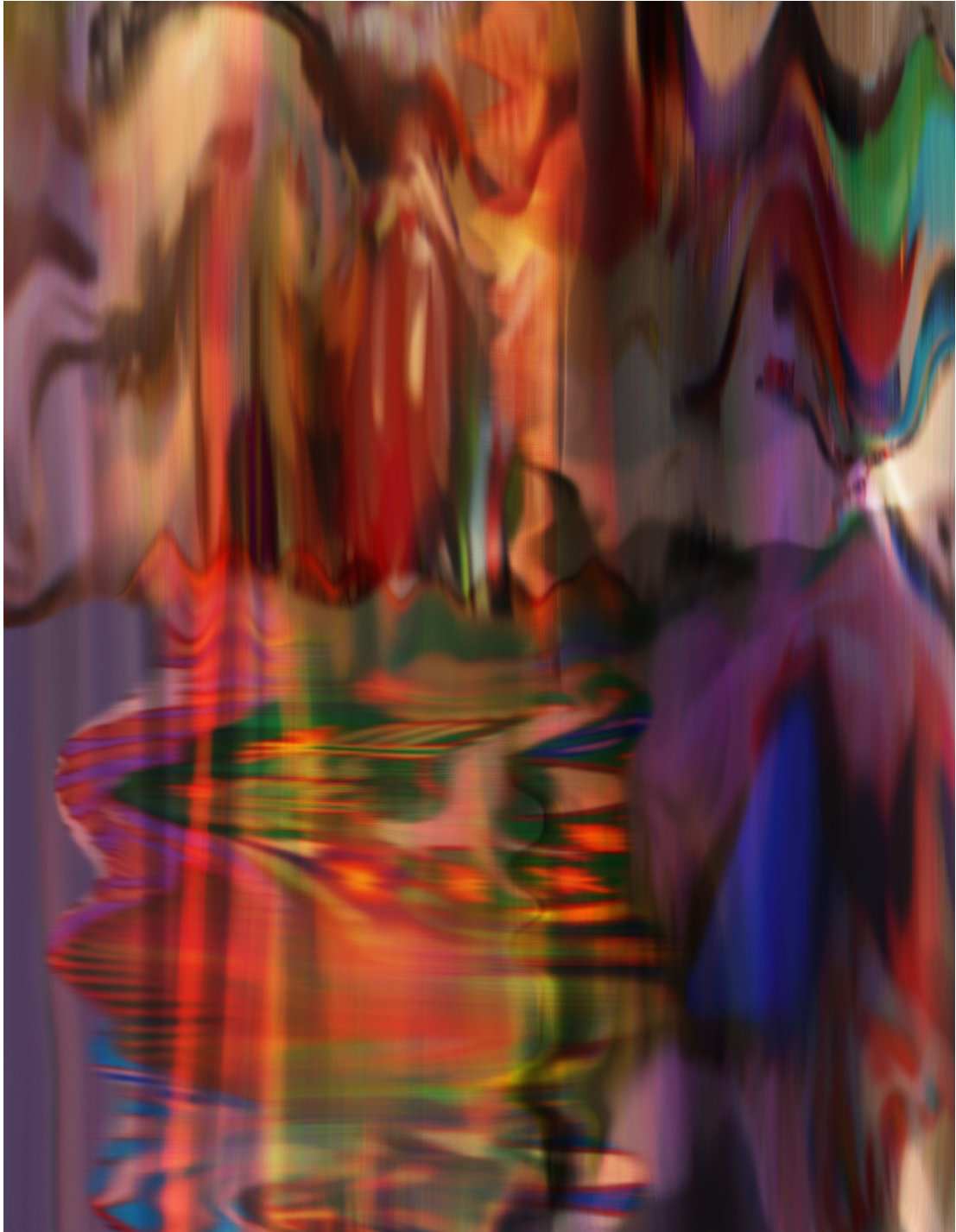


Fig. 4. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Wixari*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

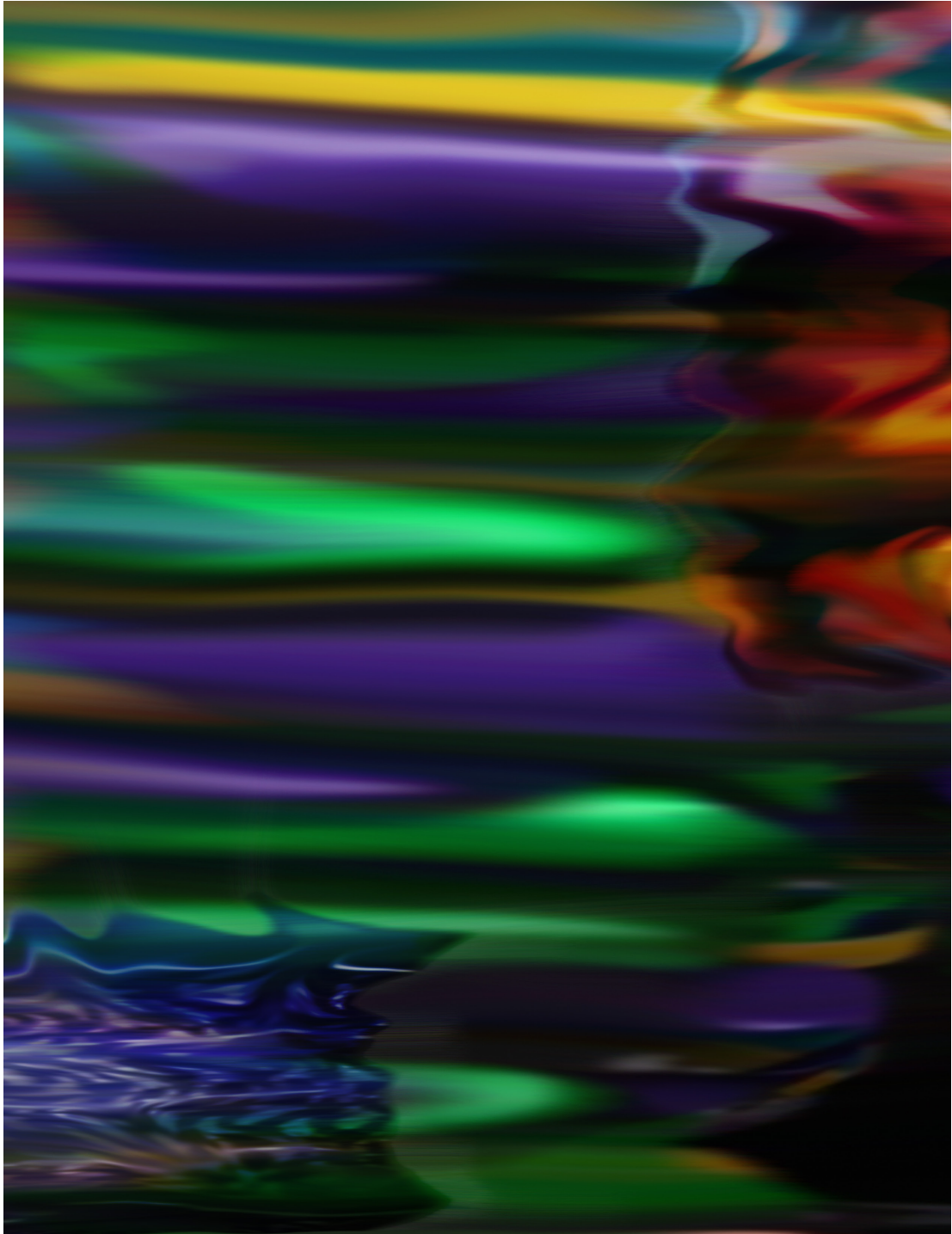


Fig. 5. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Purepecha*, -Posters, inkjet printing August, 2019

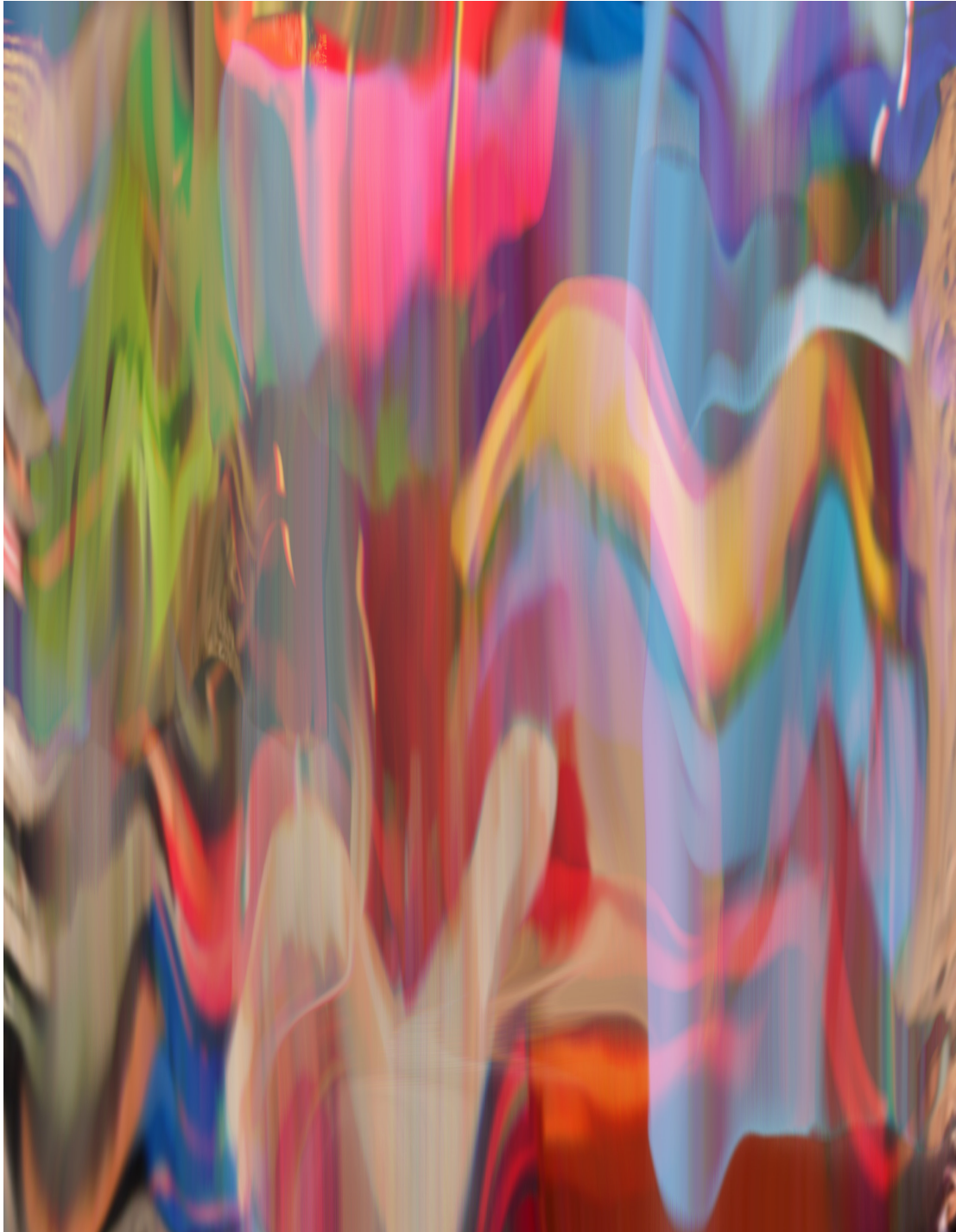


Fig. 6. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Seri-Posters*, inkjet printing, August, 2019



Fig. 7. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Raramuri*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

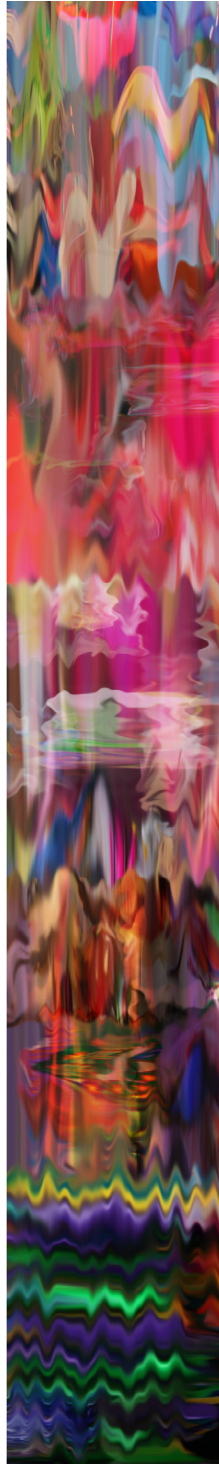


Fig. 8. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *México*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

6.2 Project 2: Hieroglyphs

This project aims to explore how Mesoamerican Indigenous communities perceive themselves before the Spaniard conquest. This Hieroglyphs project began by gathering a variety of Codices which archive different forms of written communication used by Indigenous communities, such as Mexica, Olmec, Mayan, and Aztec. A Codex is a historical, first-hand source through which Indigenous societies employed scribes to faithfully portray their achievements, as well as cultural and scientific advances.

Since antiquity, these manuscripts have provided knowledge about these ancient people. They are also an organized chronological manual of rituals, forecasts, and astronomical facts. Project 2 narrows the data collection to the Mayan Codices, such as the Paris Codex, Dresden Codex, Madrid Codex, and Grolier Codex. Dresden Codex is one of the manuscripts, among other Codices, wherein the Spaniards did not intervene by writing down their speculations regarding its meaning. This Codex is a strip measuring three and a half meters long and folded biombo style, consisting of 78 painted and hand-written pages. Information about the community's visual language was also documented. In his book, *Análisis de estructuras en el Codice Dresde, The Structural Analysis of the Dresden Codex*, Roberto Escalante (1971) analyzed the ancient Mayan writing system to demonstrate how it functioned and formulated a grammatical structure for their language. This Codex also illustrates how the Mayan writing style is part of a mixed system based on a logo-syllabic writing method, and supported by a number of monosyllabic words which include phonetic and semantic components. The mix of phonetics and pictograms are systematically combined to generate new meanings.

The examination of the collected data revealed that Mayan people represent their oral meanings in a pictorial form which expresses, distributes, and acknowledges their culture and traditions. The data also showed that Mayans had a writing system to embody their thinking. This means of expression, although created by higher members of their community, cannot be interfered with or interpreted by someone outside their

culture. Mayans made use of hieroglyphs as a means of communicating with others within their own communities, embracing their culture. While researching the various meanings founded within the Mayan hieroglyph system, I encountered strong and powerful written representations of thought that could be used in a modern context. This project, unlike other projects, does not respond to the stereotypes portrayed by mass and social media but rather aims to visually explore and honor how ancient Indigenous people expressed themselves.

I used my insights developed from researching Codices and the Mayan writing system to develop a concept for this project, which was the creation of a glyph set based on the same principles of the Mayan hieroglyphs. My new glyphs look to honor the ancestral writing system and re-purpose elements to be realized in a contemporary context (Fig. 9,10). To initiate the design of my glyph set I first studied the Mayan hieroglyphs, following through a book titled *Introduction to Mayan Hieroglyphics* by Harri Kettunen and Christophe Helmke (2014). This text allowed me to understand how the Mayan hieroglyphs were designed, as well as their meaning and composition. I designed abstract geometric versions of the original logo-glyphs, keeping their original meaning. After the construction of the first set of glyphs, I developed a syllabary based on the Mayan ideographic and syllabographic language to constructed a meaning based on a combination of vowels and consonants which form syllables (Fig. 11,12,13). This project focused on designing a syllabary and a set of glyphs for use as a means of written visual expression.

Reflecting on my creative and making process for the hieroglyphs and syllabary allowed me to explore and understand how ancient Indigenous people used systematic visual representations to embody their culture and traditions. My creating of new glyphs based on an ancient visual language was realized to be a risky exploration as it tread on the borders of appropriation. Although I did not modify the meanings, I did simplify and geometrically abstract the composition of each glyph. This brings up the limitation of a viewer misinterpreting my glyphs as a complete understanding of the Mayans' ancestral

writing system. Even though it was a risky visual proposal, it worked as an experiment to bring the ideographic and syllabographic language into a modern context. The content of this project finds use in future thesis artifacts as a form of hieroglyphic writing which has the ability to work as a new means of expression which Indigenous people could be using today, visually representing a merger between ancient and modern. From this work, new questions arose which include: How do contemporary Indigenous people continue to preserve and embrace their knowledge and culture? How are their new cultural expressions perceived by the mass and social media? How can design be used as a tool to visually counteract the negative perceptions media has towards Indigenous people?

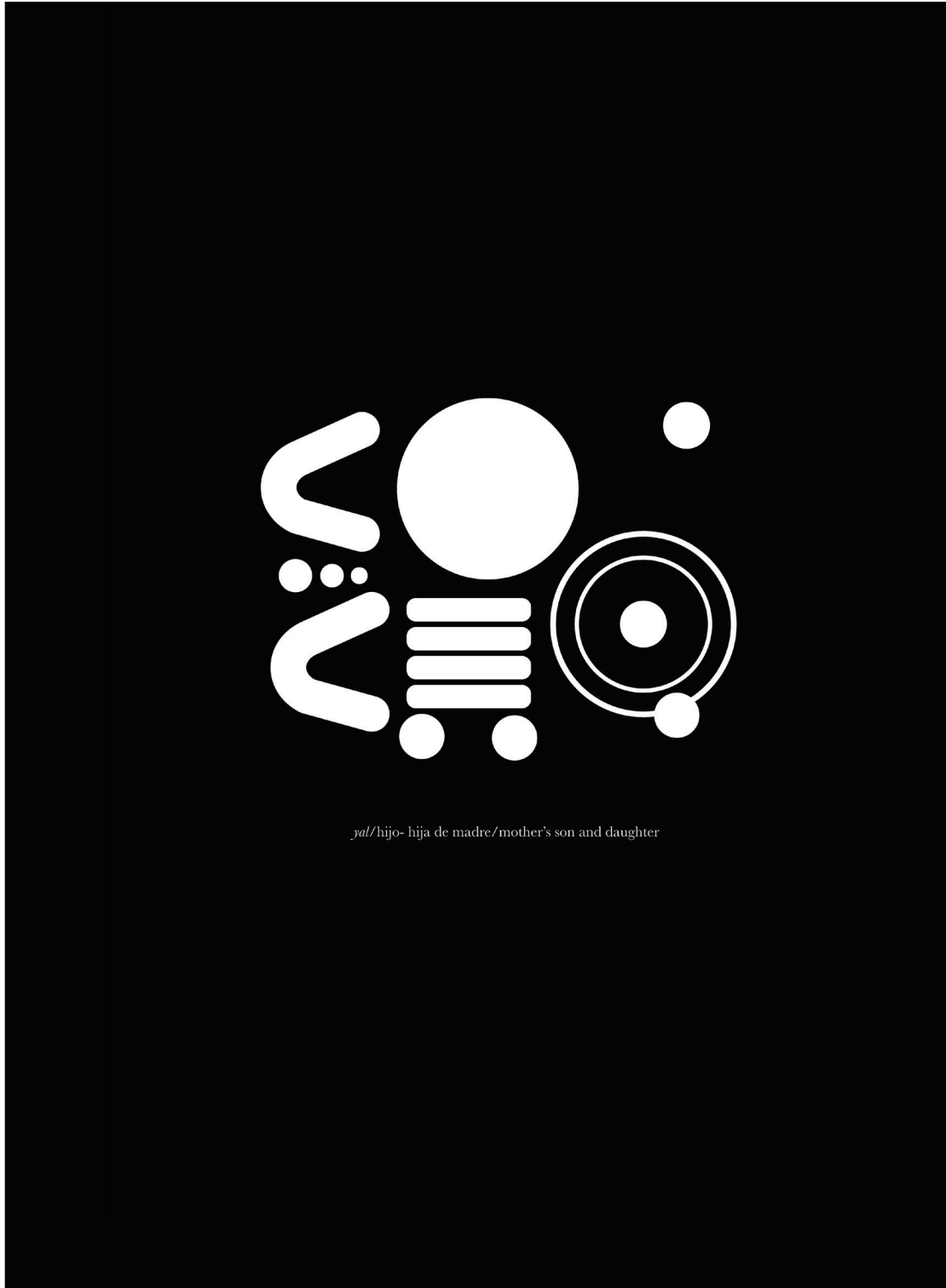


Fig. 9. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Hieroglyphs*, -Poster, inkjet printing, August, 2019

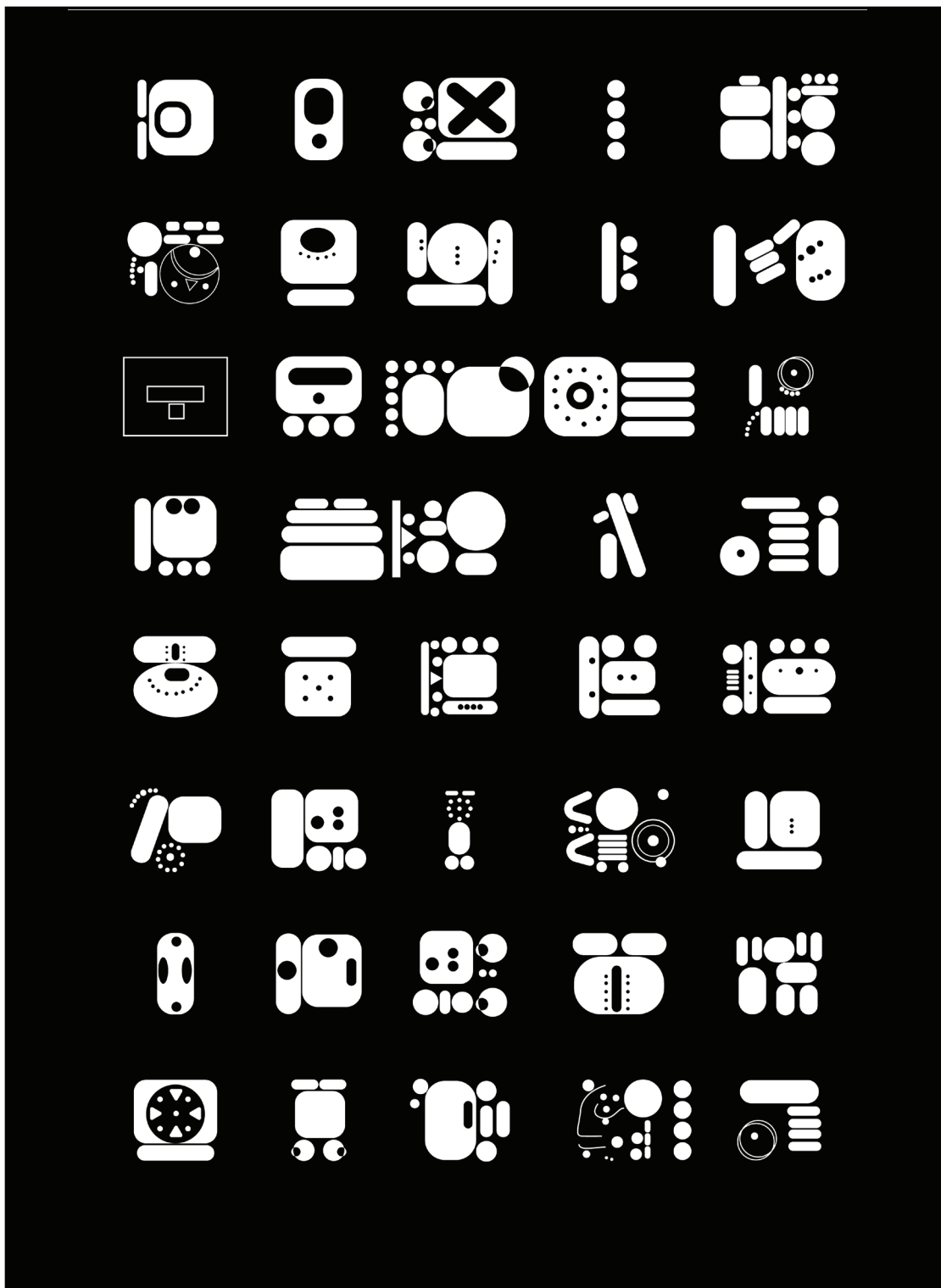


Fig. 10. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Hieroglyphs*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

vowels	a	e	i	o	u	ch'	a	e	i	o	u	t	a	e	i	o	u
b						h						tz					
ch						i						w					
ch						j						x					
ch						k						y					
ch						m						n					
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Fig. 11. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Syllabary*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

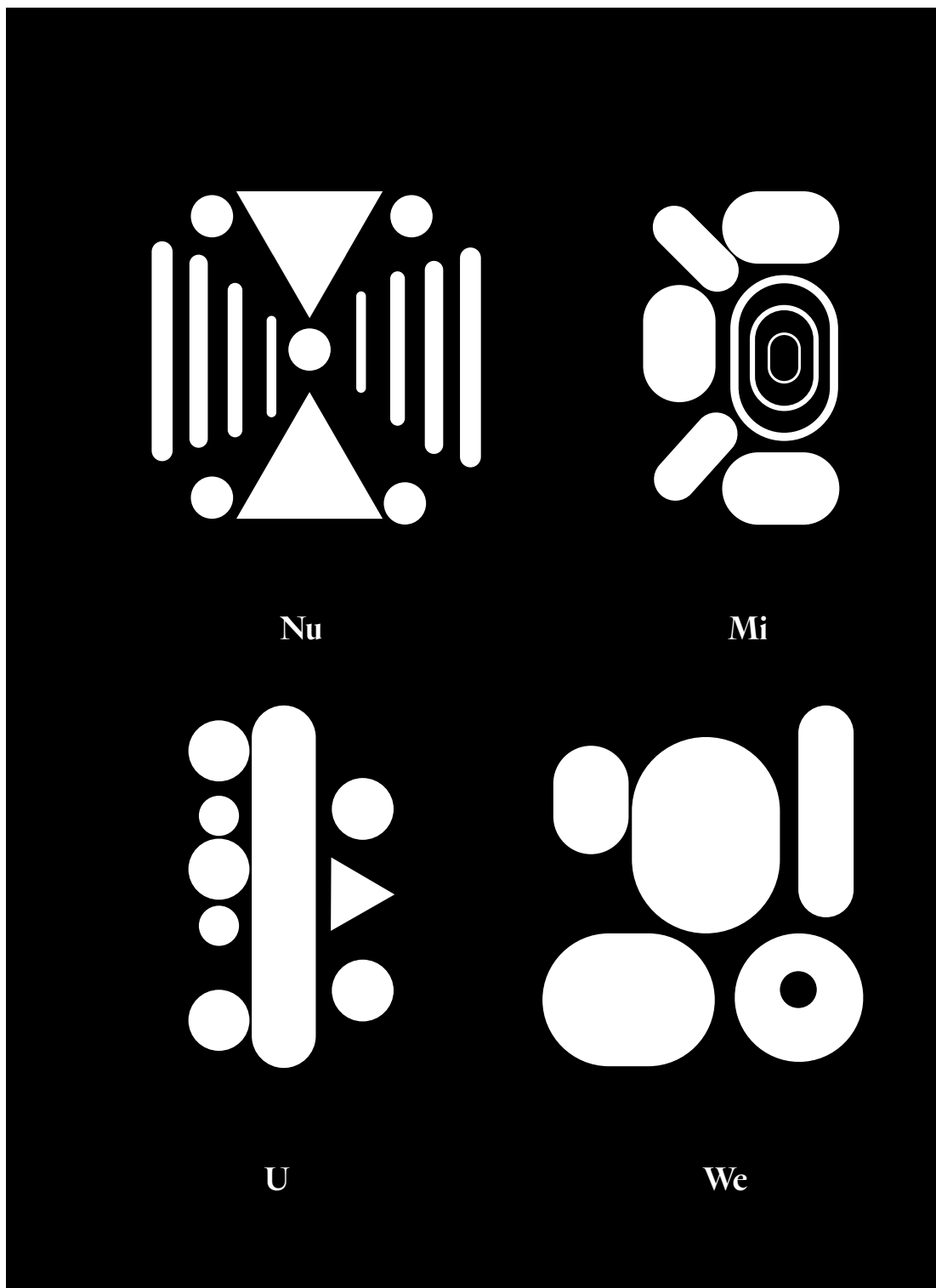


Fig. 12. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Syllabary*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

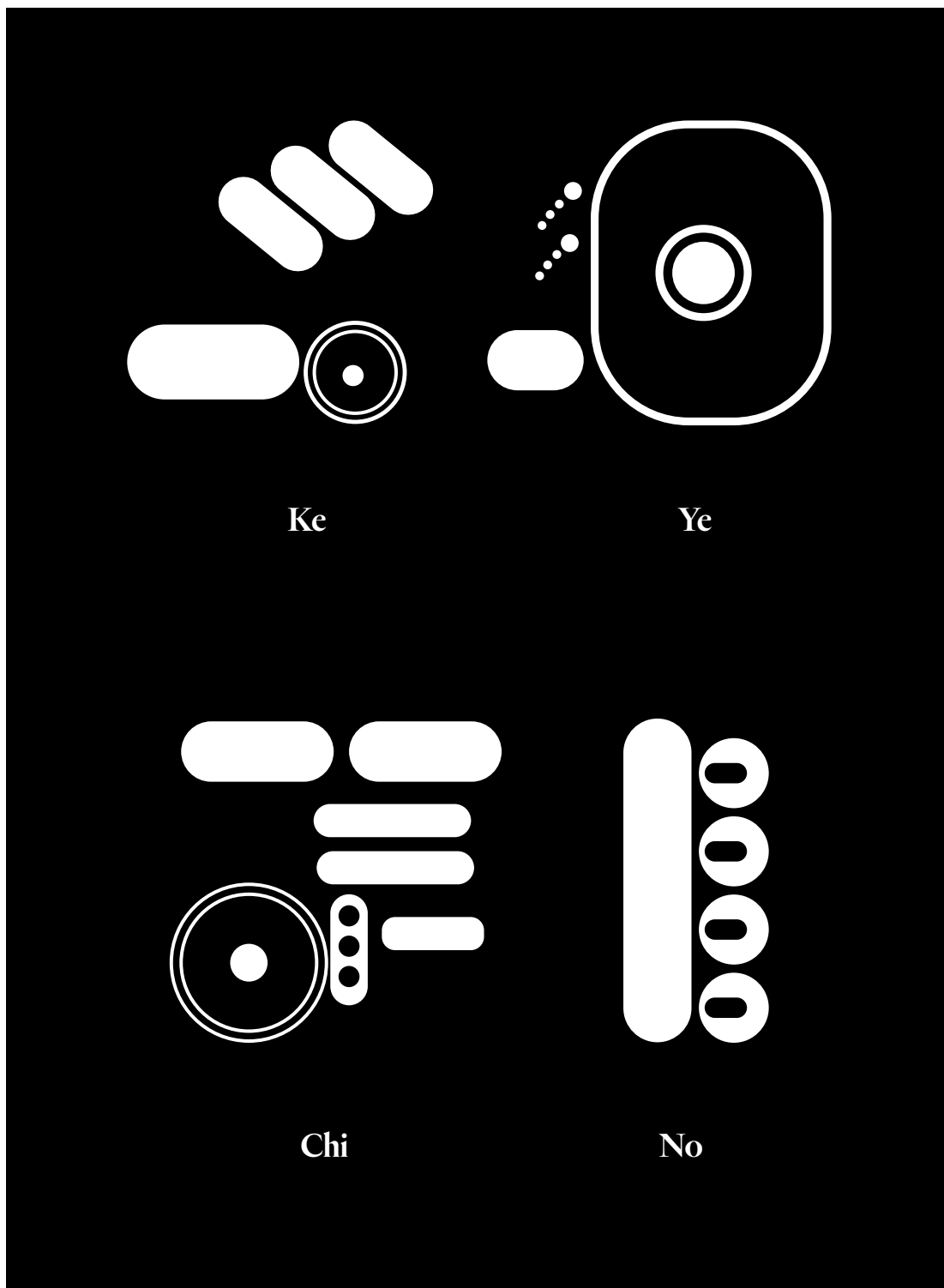


Fig. 13. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Syllabary*, -Posters, inkjet printing, August, 2019

6.3 Project 3: A Contemporary Glimpse into the Richness of Indigenous People in Mexico

This project exposes an alternative means of perceiving and understanding the cultural richness of various Indigenous communities in Mexico, as well as how Indigenous people are asserting themselves and pushing against mass media communication platforms. In order to visually approach these ideas, I collected images and information from Zapotec and Mixtec Indigenous musicians as well as a transgender community. I acquired images, videos, songs, and parade documentation from different mass and social media platforms, such as YouTube, Vimeo, Vogue Magazine, BBC Travel, Vice, National Geographic, Spotify, Instagram, New York Times Magazine, Forbes Magazine, Mexican online newspapers, and independent websites produced by local people who are within these communities. This project then concentrated the information to focus on two Indigenous singers and an Indigenous transgender group called *Muxe*.

In Mexico, there is a third gender in addition to male and female called *Muxes*. According to the anthropologist Lucas Avedaño, “a *muxe* is a person assigned male at birth but culturally behaves within roles that are distant from what is masculine. Muxiety existed before 1521, but since then they had to live pretending in silence”(Great Big Story, 2018). This community is composed of Zapotecs whose native tongue is Zapotec, which does not have a pronoun distinguishing between a man and a woman. “Personally, I would say, *Muxe* is not a she or a he. It is *Muxe*—period” (Great Big Story, 2018). A *Muxe* usually wears the traditional attire of Zapotec women, which signals the political stance that everyone has the power and freedom to be who they want to be.

Mare Advertencia Lirika, known as Mare, is an Indigenous Zapotec hip-hop artist who uses music to embrace her cultural heritage and fight for Mexican women’s rights. She “intertwines Indigenous identity and progressive politics into her lyrics” (MacGabhann, 2015). Mare is preserving her language and empowering other women by giving them a voice through her music. Another musician example is María Reyna González from Santa María

Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca, who is an Indigenous opera singer known as the “ambassador of the Indigenous languages” within a genre labelled “opera mixe” (Salvatierra, 2018).

Indigenous people are not only embracing their cultural identity and preserving their languages and traditions, they are also showing that the culture of Indigenous people is not truthfully represented by the stereotypes depicted in mainstream media. Although many people still stigmatize Indigenous people as being ignorant and outdated, these active members raise their voices by stepping outside of the stereotypes and thoughtfully represent community characteristics such as, richness of identity and culture through the music industry, arts, sports, technology, and even sociology. It can be seen that Indigenous culture is mobilizing to challenge the stereotypical perceptions which have followed them for many years, contributing to finding new ways to inspire others in representing their culture.

The analysis of the collected media data revealed that powerful international media outlets, including the New York Times, Forbes, and VICE, have taken initiatives in broadcasting the truthful nature and prosperity of Mexican Indigenous people. Although Mexico has some online newspaper publications and YouTube channels, local mass and social media outlets still do not highlight the achievements that Indigenous people are reaching, like other mediums outside Mexico do. This project recognized these trends and seeks to represent, share, and visually expose the practices of contemporary Indigenous people in Mexican society which are directed towards embracing their own culture and identity. How are present day Indigenous people counteracting the stereotypes which have been envisioned by mass and social media over the years?

Using the above analysis as a basis for visual response, this project exposes and visually shares a message in opposition to the stereotypes portrayed by mass and social media, highlighting the wide range of talent and abilities held by Indigenous people. I designed four collage poster compositions to explore these ideas. The syllabary and hieroglyphics designed in project number two emphasizes the meaning of the messages found within each poster. For instance, the 3 glyphs used in the first collage make reference to the meaning - bloody drops and guardian or protector. The second poster uses a glyph which references the third gender, which

is neither a she or he. The third poster uses a combination of the glyph found on the second poster and an additional glyph representative of presenting or revealing - the unveiling of the third gender. Finally, the last poster makes a compound word constructed from the syllabary which means “unique”.

The first collage poster exposes how Indigenous women are depicted by mass and social media (Fig. 14). This first poster acted as a foundation for the other three posters. It provided the portrayal of stereotypical perceptions which then gives ground for the three following posters to respond in an optimistic light, offering the viewer a positive to negative comparative understanding. The remaining artifacts then demonstrated how Indigenous people are embracing and rescuing their cultural identity through various manifestations, such as music and gender identity. The next two artifacts (Fig. 15 & 16) expose the *Muxe* community, challenging the stereotype that Indigenous people are not modern or remain stuck in the past. The last poster shows two Indigenous women who seek to rescue their language and empower women through music (Fig. 17).

Collage compositions allowed me to create a dynamic representation of the investigated social problem. I chose collage compositions because this technique uses the contextual change of existing imagery to communicate new meaningful perspectives, the underlying meaning of this project harmonizes with the visual execution of contextual change. The created artifacts aim to communicate a new perspective of images which had been output by mass and social media; images representative of Indigenous people. This technique allowed me to deconstruct the Indigenous visual representations which are spread through mass media outlets and re-purpose the imagery for a positive use. These posters gave me access to new ways of visually perceiving Indigenous people and a means of highlighting their achievements.

To create the collages I collected and assembled different expressions of contemporary Indigenous people embracing their culture to represent a contextual change which offers a more positive means of perceiving them. The collage compositions are a visual response

and counter action taken against the Indigenous stereotypes which Mexico's mass media and social media spread and create. It should be noted that communicative limitations did arise in these artifacts, as the audience may not have the ability to understand the custom hieroglyphs.

Creating these collage posters was my first approach to conducting a visual response reflective of Indigenous stereotypes presented by mass and social media. To continue moving forward this work generated a call for more inquiry in regard to the use of stereotypes. How can the stereotypes presented by the media be understood in a graphic manner? What are the main Indigenous stereotypes shared by the media, and how can design respond to them? What visual outcomes can be designed to instigate a critical thinking process around this social problem?

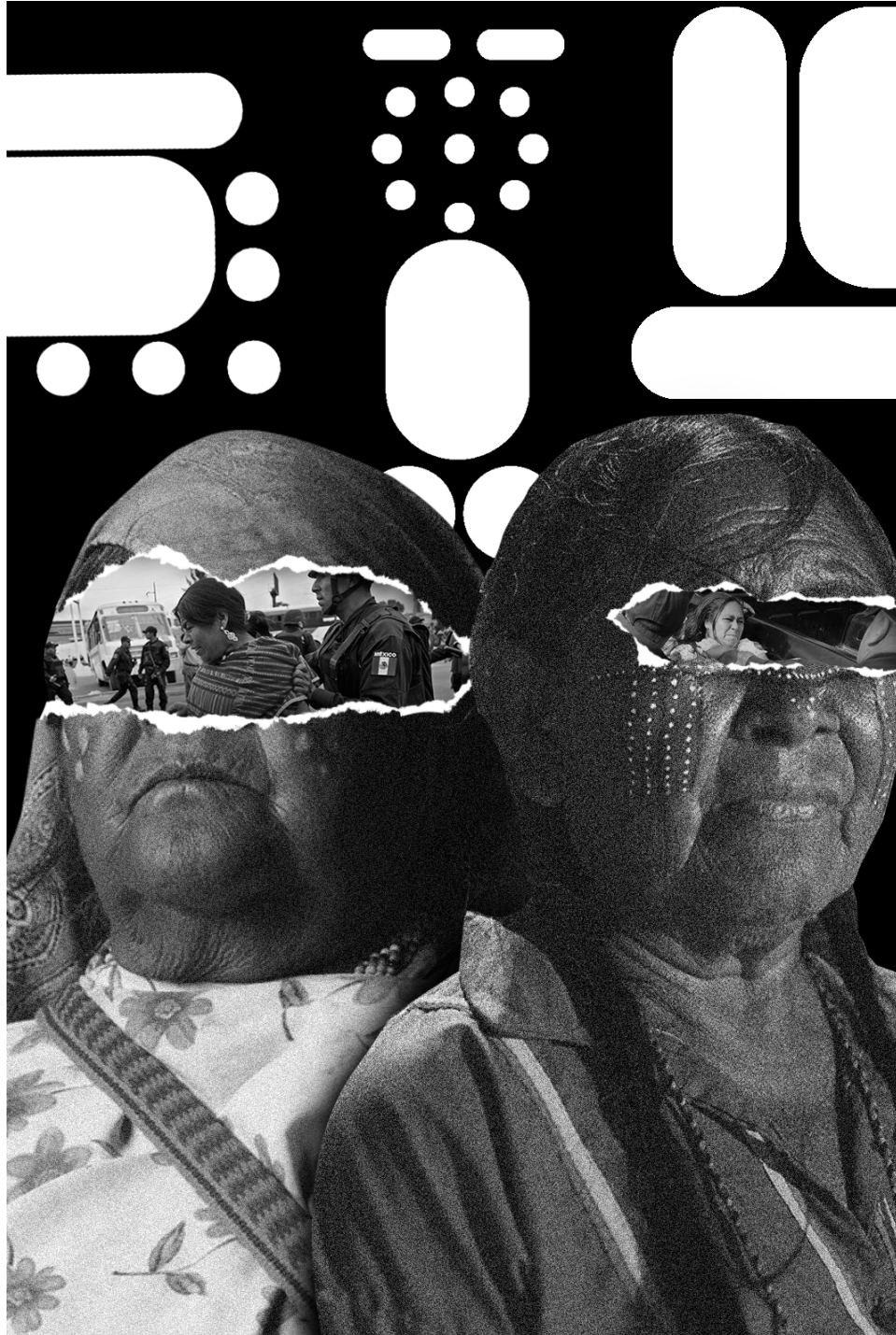


Fig. 14. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *ch'a-ji / gotita de sangre / droplet of blood*, - Poster-collage, inkjet printing, November, 2019



Fig. 15. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *na-wa/ la develacion/unveiling*, -Poster-collage, inkjet printing, November, 2019



Fig. 16. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *u/el-ella-ello/HeShe*-Poster-collage, inkjet printing, November, 2019

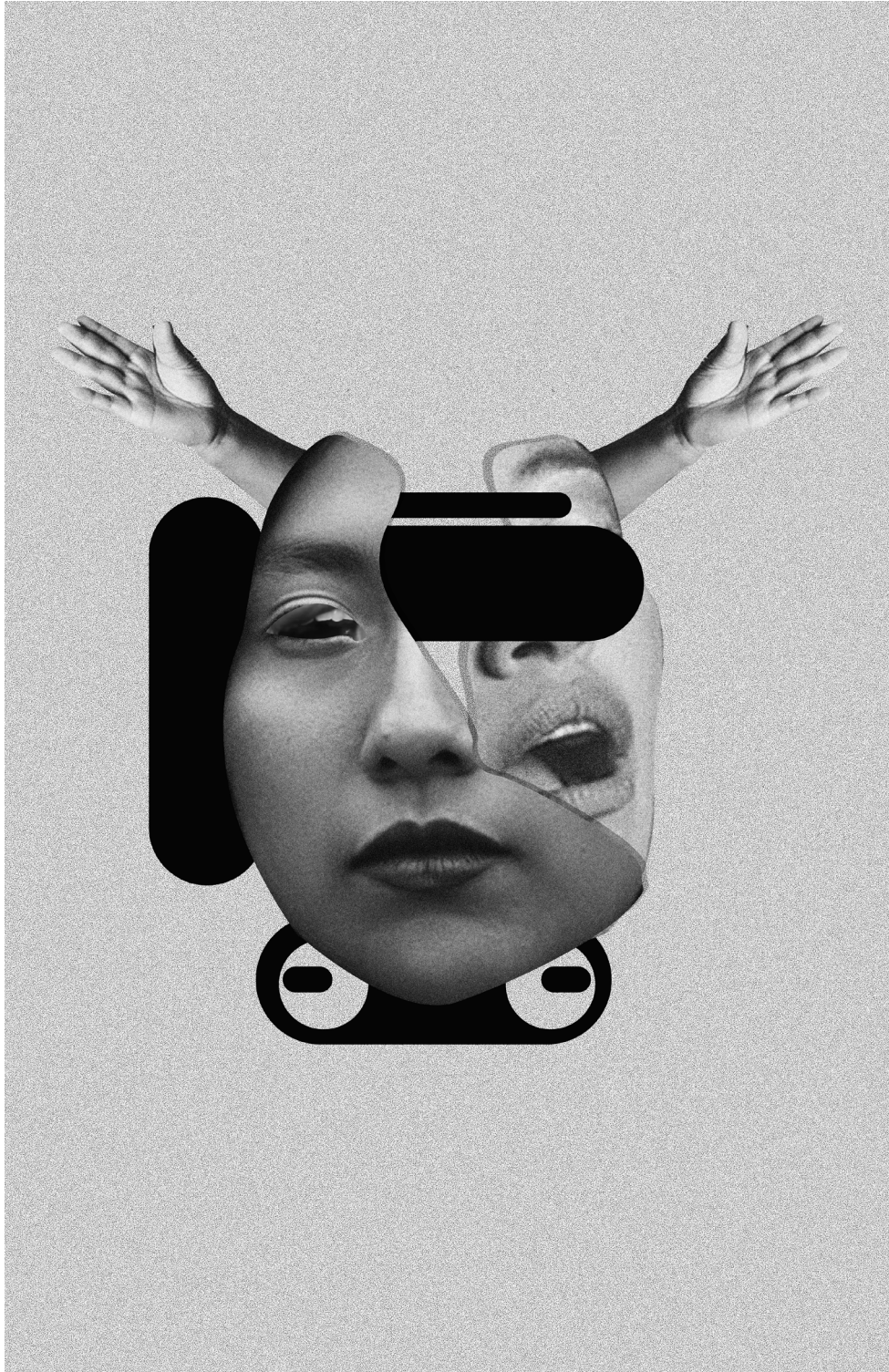


Fig. 17. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *uniko/unique*,—Poster-collage, inkjet printing, November, 2019

6.4 Project 4: Breaking Stereotypes

This project functions as an introduction to the performance of stereotypes as executed through various visual representations. A focus is placed foremost on exploring the meaning of the term “stereotype” by reviewing the theoretical background knowledge explored in Chapter Two, and initiating a visual exploration which looks to understand this concept more in depth. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2020), the word “stereotype” has two noun definitions:

- 1 “A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.”
- 2 “A relief printing plate cast in a mold made from composed type or an original plate.”

This project visually represents the first definition of a stereotype through the medium of the second definition of a stereotype, looking to reveal what it would look like in a material form. Expanding on the concept mentioned above,

“Stereotype, is a type of printing plate developed in the late 18th century and widely used in letterpress, newspaper, and other high-speed press runs. Stereotypes are made by locking the type columns, illustration plates, and advertising plates of a complete newspaper page in a form and molding a matrix, or mat, of papier-mâché or similar material to it; the dried mat is used as a mold to cast the stereotype from hot metal. A stereotype plate is much stronger and more durable under the press run than would be the composed page of type. It is gradually being replaced, however, by photopolymer (photosensitive plastic) and lithographic plates”. (Britannica, 2020)

The main purpose of this old printing method was to enable many identical images to be reproduced in the media. Thus, this project was made to represent a metaphor for how

Mexican mass media makes a first impression, image, or idea of Indigenous people and reproduces it. If stereotypes are the first impression, image, or idea of people, how can design be applied to perform one visually?

The artifacts created in this project are a set of stereotypes that include various information about Mock-Spanish as well as some examples of. I laser cut different phrases on a plastic surface and used modeling clay to create a negative impression plate, let it dry, and then used it as a stamp. I coated the impression with black ink to serve as a printing method, this could then be reused in future projects. This printing method is used to emphasize the importance of reproducing information (stereotypes) without reflecting on their social effects, as well as to visually challenge how the media expresses prejudice against Indigenous people (Fig. 18 & 19).

As a designer, this project taught me the possibilities of exploring a concept with unfamiliar techniques such as clay or laser cutting. The process resulted in the generation of not only new visual explorations but an in-depth understanding through making. Challenges of this project were found in the lack of control over the visual results. Many factors, such as the different kinds of clay, the water, thickness of the plate, or even the drying environment, were aspects that influenced the final outcome. Despite the limitation of controlling the results the stereotype printing method gave my piece its own expression. The process of generating this artifact gave me insights as to how I can continue exploring the concept of stereotypes from a design perspective. How can a graphic design artefact perform as being representative of a stereotype; poor, ugly, and illiterate? How can a poor, ugly, and illiterate design artifact be used to grasp an in-depth understanding of these stereotypes? How can the stereotypes which Indigenous people are stigmatized with be shown through a design artifact to spark critical thinking?



Fig. 18. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Stereotype*,—Clay November, 2019



Fig. 19. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Fissure*, -Clay, November, 2019

6.5 Project 5: Ugly and Poor Typeface

Mass media frequently portrays Indigenous people as poor and ugly. It is true that some Indigenous communities in Mexico live in poverty as a result of various factors involving the Mexican government and surrounding socio-political context. This portrayal of “poor” is often represented in the mass media through visuals which situate Indigenous people as working in fields or selling their crafted wares on the street. These jobs associate the workers with a desperation for income and the inability to secure a high paying or “respected” job. The other stereotype, “ugly,” comes from the belief that Indigenous people are not physically appealing. When considering the social caste system discussed earlier it can be determined that the Spaniards believed themselves superior to Indigenous people, not only because of their power over others, but because of their bodily form. 500 years after Spanish colonization, Mexican society still carries this stigma. In the present day, those who are not Caucasian or appear to have Indigenous bodily features are considered less attractive and ugly. The mass media tends to make generalized communal assumptions based on behaviors, such as income opportunities and physical features, thereby generating stereotypes. This project makes use of the aforementioned characteristics and embeds them in a typeface; the visualization of written communication. A typeface allows for text-based messages to embody the same defining stereotypical characteristics as those which are placed on the Indigenous people of Mexico by mass media.

Karen Cheng states that “language is arguably the most significant human characteristic. Through a complex system of signs, sounds, and symbols, ideas and messages are communicated to our ever-expanding global society—information that has the power to shape and change civilization itself. Type is the visual manifestation of language. It is instrumental in turning characters into words, and words into messages” (Cheng, 2005, p.7). The aim of this project was to create a typeface with specific characteristics which could then be used to represent ideas and messages, challenging the dominant perception towards Indigenous people.

The objective of this typeface was to perform the notion of poverty and ugliness through design. The question informing this project was, “what does a poor and ugly typeface look like?” Being poor is to lack something. This typeface was designed to lack balance, consistency in contrast, legibility, push away from traditional conventions in type design, and be overall inconsistent in its design. The typeface hangs on to just enough integrated details for it to be understood as a unit.

In order to learn how to create a poor and ugly typeface I thoroughly studied the book *Designing Type* by Karen Cheng (2005), which teaches traditional approaches to the process of type design. By recognizing the traditional I was able to challenge rules and patterns of common practice such as optical adjustments, proportional measurement systems, and side bearing consistencies. The ‘poorness’ of this typeface consist of re-purposing parts of the letters, such as strict modular serif, spine, upper lobe, eye, leg, and ascenders. This typeface cannot afford symmetry or balance, does not have a lowercase, extended punctuation, small caps, ligatures, diacritics, or contextual alternates. The design process for drawing letter forms had been pursued through the deconstruction of an existing typeface classified as a “Didone”. “Didones reflect expressive ideals of Romanticism” (Cheng, 2005, p.14). Understanding that Romanticism is the deepened appreciation of beauty, I pulled apart the personality of this Didone typeface and re-purposed the elements to create a visual opposition. The process resulted in a letter set which performs as an ‘ugly’ typeface (Fig. 20,21,22,23 & 24).

As a designer this project gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with the type design process; a field of design which I had not explored prior to this thesis. Although the purpose of the poor and ugly typeface was to unfollow the rules of type design, I still had to learn how to design in opposition to common practice. The pursuit of embedding ideals of poor and ugly in a typeface allowed me to explore an anti-aesthetic concept and process. The anti-aesthetic design of this artifact serves critical thinking purposes. Following the design of this typeface it was applied throughout another project called *Not a Racist Book*. Through the use of this typeface in the context of the book I aimed

to expose the audience to how an ugly and poor typeface can work to communicate a message which encourages reflection and an alternative social perception of Indigenous people.

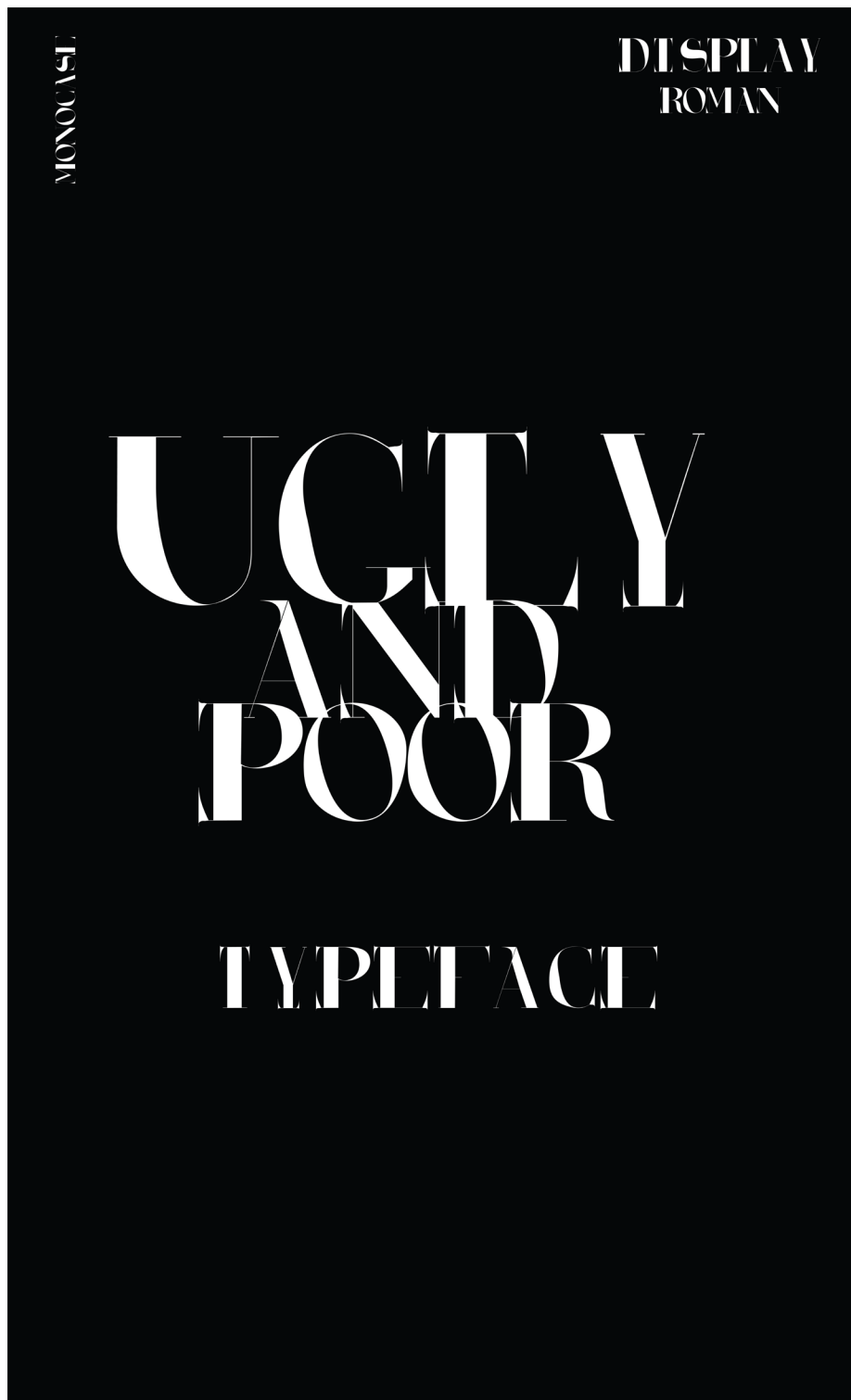


Fig. 20. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Ugly and Poor*, –November, 2019



Fig. 21. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Ugly and Poor*, –November, 2019

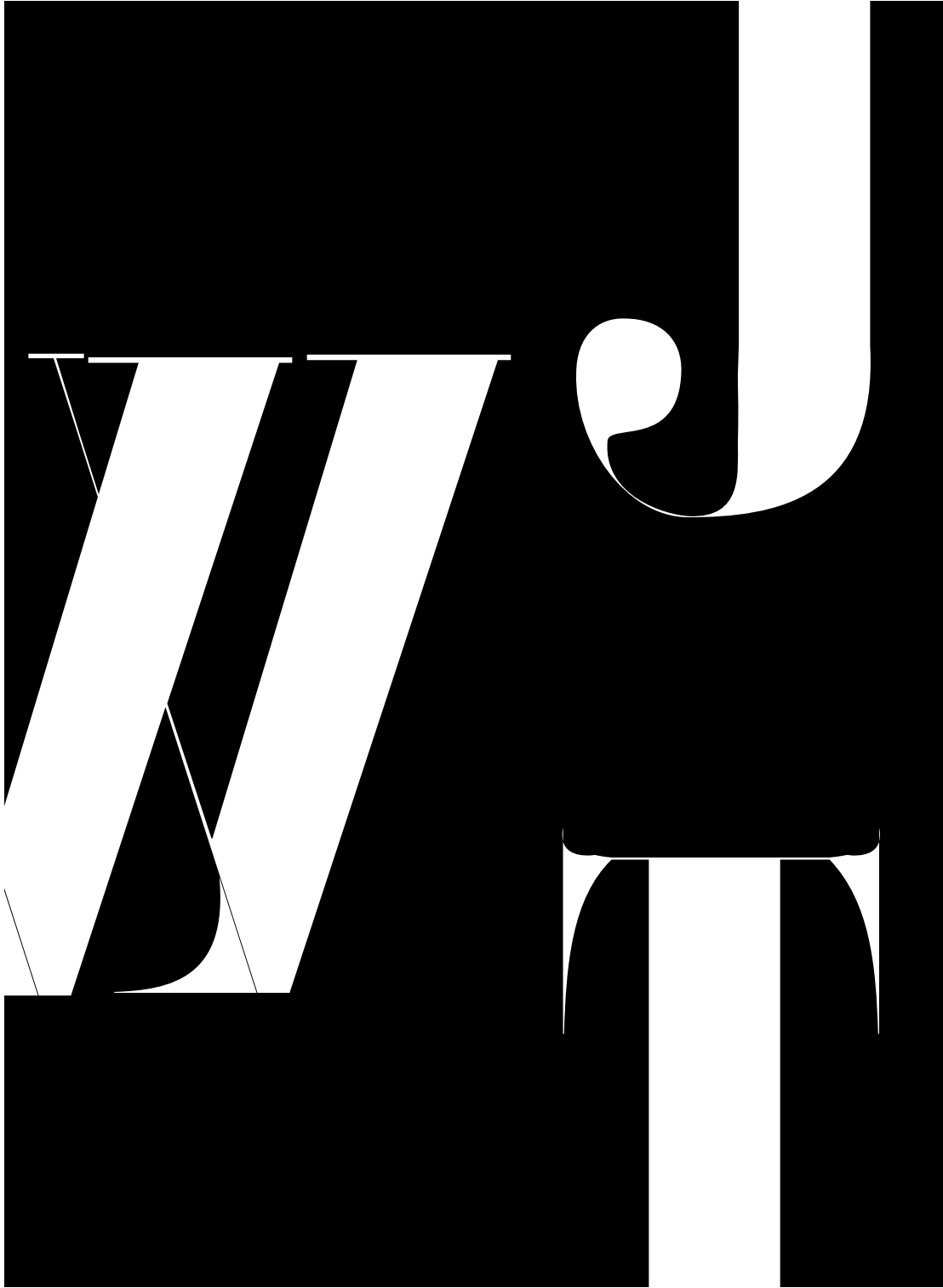


Fig. 22. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *The ugliness and poorness of a typeface*, November, 2019



Fig. 23. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *The ugliness and poorness of a typeface*, November, 2019



Fig. 24. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *The ugliness and poorness of a typeface*, November, 2019

6.6 Project 6: Illiterate Zine

Through design, the conducted projects perform a discursive representation of prevailing stereotypes portrayed by the mass and social media in regard to Indigenous people. This project works with one of the main stereotypes, which is illiterateness. The project used examples of Mock-Spanish (refer to Chapter 3) to visually express the resulting effects that this kind of language produces when used in media.

To begin the project an analysis was conducted framed by a collection of political discourses, TV shows, music, movies, advertisements, political figures, and YouTube channels (i.e., The Office, Schoolboy Q - Collard Greens (Explicit) ft. Kendrick Lamar, Key & Peele Loco Gangsters, Spanish Words “White” People Can’t Say, Coca Cola - Hispanic Heritage commercial, Donald Trump, Will and Grace, Cinco de Drinko, Napoleon Dynamite, Futurama, and Scrubs). In the process of narrowing down this collection, two examples were selected: the first one was Donald Trump’s speech regarding the issue of immigration. In his speech, he used the Spanish word “hombre” to refer to the immigrants that he views as bad people, verbalizing negative connotations. Nonetheless, “hombre” in Spanish means “men” without any negative meanings. This is a great example of Mock-Spanish as stated by Hill (1998). The second example was a YouTube video from a channel called Camel Threads, where two ladies “celebrated” the commemorative day Cinco de Mayo in Mexico by tasting different Mexican beers and choosing which one tastes better. They named the video *Cinco de Drinko* combining the word Drink and *cinco*, which translates from Spanish to “five” in English.

The use of language is important in determining, as well as socially defining, when a minority is being represented stereotypically. In these examples, people use language to stereotype Mexican people as drinkers and criminals. The highlighted uses of Mock-Spanish participate in a racist and discriminatory discourse which correlates with Hill’s research. Demeaning minorities’ language contributes to the formulation and reinforcement of stereotypes and it is important to notice how the use of language in

Mexico's mass media plays a crucial role in shaping the perception of Mexican society in regard to Indigenous people. When considering the plethora of stereotypes that are used to represent the Indigenous people of Mexico, illiteracy is one that occurs commonly. Over the years, the mass media in Mexico has portrayed Indigenous people as incapable of reading or speaking Spanish properly or fluently. The reality is that the majority are bilingual; they speak their own language as well as Spanish. As a bilingual designer who speaks Spanish as a first language and English as a second, I can recognize audio cues in another Spanish speaker's vocalization which point out if that person's native language is Spanish. The person will speak with an accent if Spanish is not their first language and their pronunciation of Spanish words will not always be accurate. However, this does not mean that the speaker is illiterate or not fluent. With this behavior noted it can be recognized that Indigenous people are not ignorant; they have the capacity and ability to speak two completely different languages and obtain knowledge from both sides. This project examined how design can be illiterate and explored what an illiterate publication could look like. This *Illiterate Zine* project was a visual exploration that aimed to perform illiterate-ness through editorial design.

A zine is a small independent and short run publication which stems from the term "magazine." This method of print publication withholds historically defining qualities of being self published (either through small press or handmade), association with being known for addressing independent, controversial, or alternative topics of interest, and their distribution outside of the control of mass media. Their popularization in the 1970's punk rock era actually shows that they commonly worked in opposition to mass media. I decided to create a zine as an artifact for this project due to its historical, foundational, and material characteristics. A zine correlates with my themes of illiteracy, the counteracting of mass and social media communications, and handmade method of production.

Early in the process of designing an artifact for this project it was determined that rather than using professional design software to work with editorial design, such as Adobe

InDesign, I would use Microsoft Word (a significant downgrade). There were many constraints that came with using Microsoft Word as a design software, such as a lack of control over formatting and readability. The constraints contributed to making the artefact appear to be illiterate within the field of design, and limited the tools available when working to design an editorial piece. Additionally, a variety of editorial rules were broken, such as the disproportionate use of more than three typefaces, extension and distortion of fonts and images, not following a grid, and no correspondence between text and image. The print method of stereotyping, as discussed in Project Four, was used to materialize this zine.

The use of a stereotype printing, a method explored in Project 4 to visually counteract stereotypes which are portrayed and distributed by mass and social media. This design process was intended to create an artefact that performed not only illiterateness, as presented by the mass and social media, but also the effects that this use of language expels. The concept of creating a piece that is illiterate was an experiment in the breaking and unfollowing of rules which are commonly established in professional design practice. Using Microsoft Word as a design tool gave a uniqueness and significance to the artwork despite the coinciding design restrictions. The objective of the artefact was to be unreadable yet understandable, the stereotype printing method was a great tool to use in accomplishing this task while emphasizing the message (Fig. 25,26, 27, 28 & 29).

While reflecting on this artifact I realized that graphic design based experimentation and exploration with non-conventional tools can lead me to interesting visual creations, and an unconventional means of conducting academic research. Pursuing the *Illiterate Zine* project allowed me to visually understand, explore, and merge concepts outside of the design field to communicate a meaning in support of my research. While visually exploring Mock-Spanish and stereotypes I further developed an in-depth understanding of their underlying meanings, offering the opportunity to inform future projects. The purpose of this zine was to be rendered as illiterate and as a result the illegibility of the artifact limits the audience's understanding of the content. Despite this, I asked the

reader to go beyond the conventional literary use of a print publication and its intention was to be illegible. Another challenge of using non-conventional design programs or printing methods was a lack of control in perfecting the visual results.

As a result of this project, new insights and questions were generated such as: How can Mock Spanish be used to frame an understanding of discriminatory language used in Mexican social media? How does language in social media relate to mockery? What are the possible consequences of this use of language?

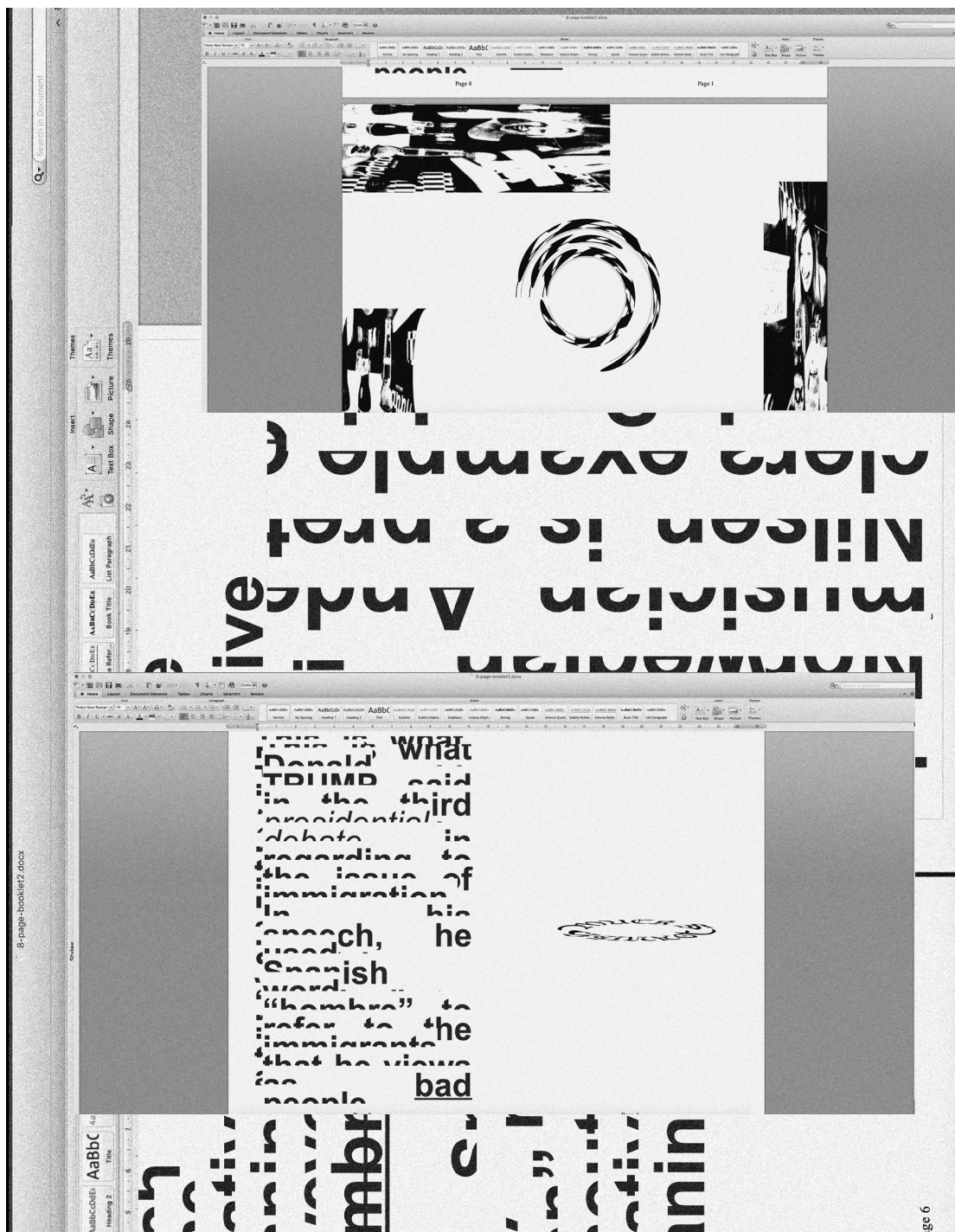


Fig. 25. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Illiterate* zine,—Poetry—Microsoft Word Screenshots, November, 2019



Fig. 26. Angélica Mota Gamboa, *Illiterate zine*,—November, 2019

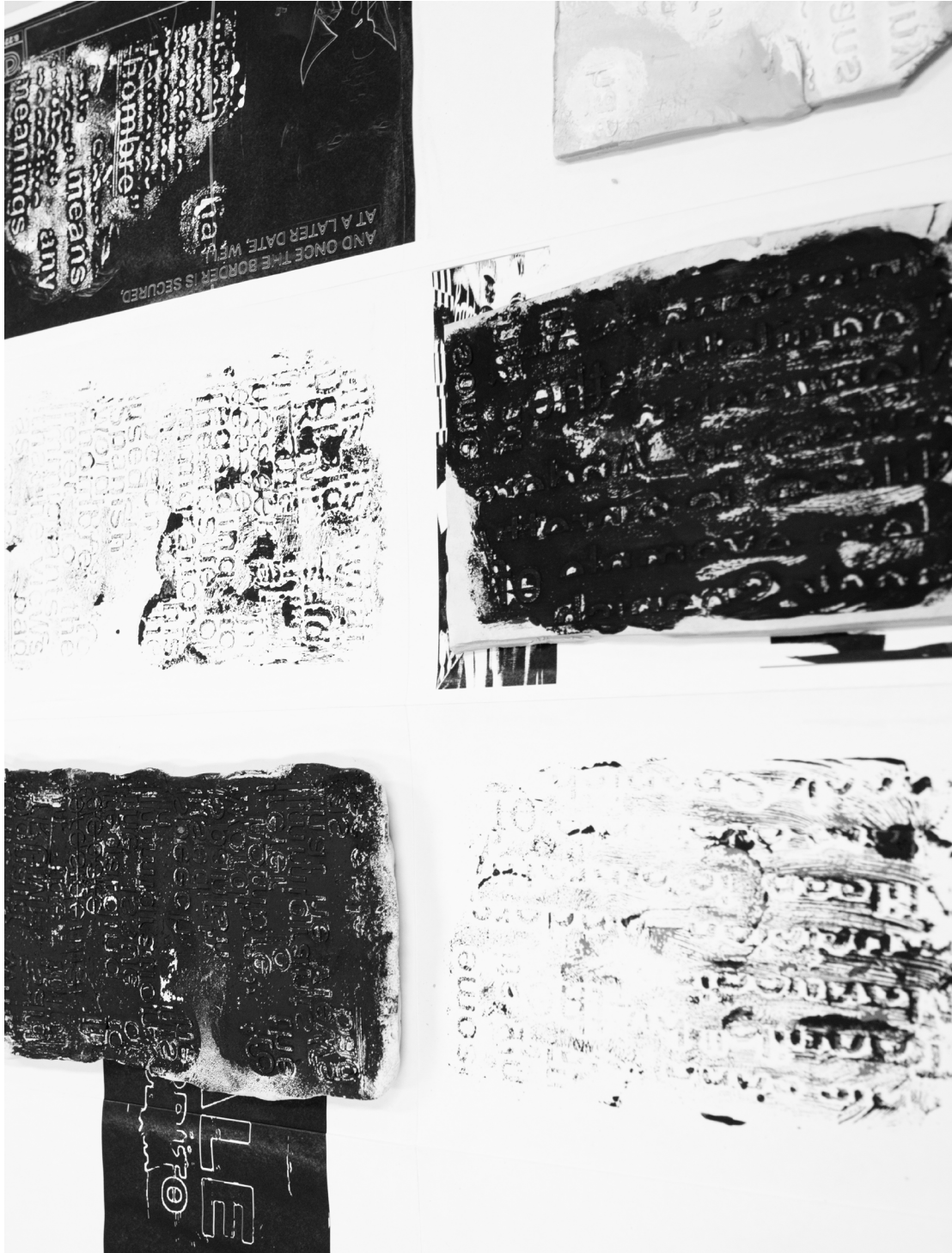


Fig. 27. Angélica Mota Gamboa, (detail) *Illiterate zine*,—November, 2019

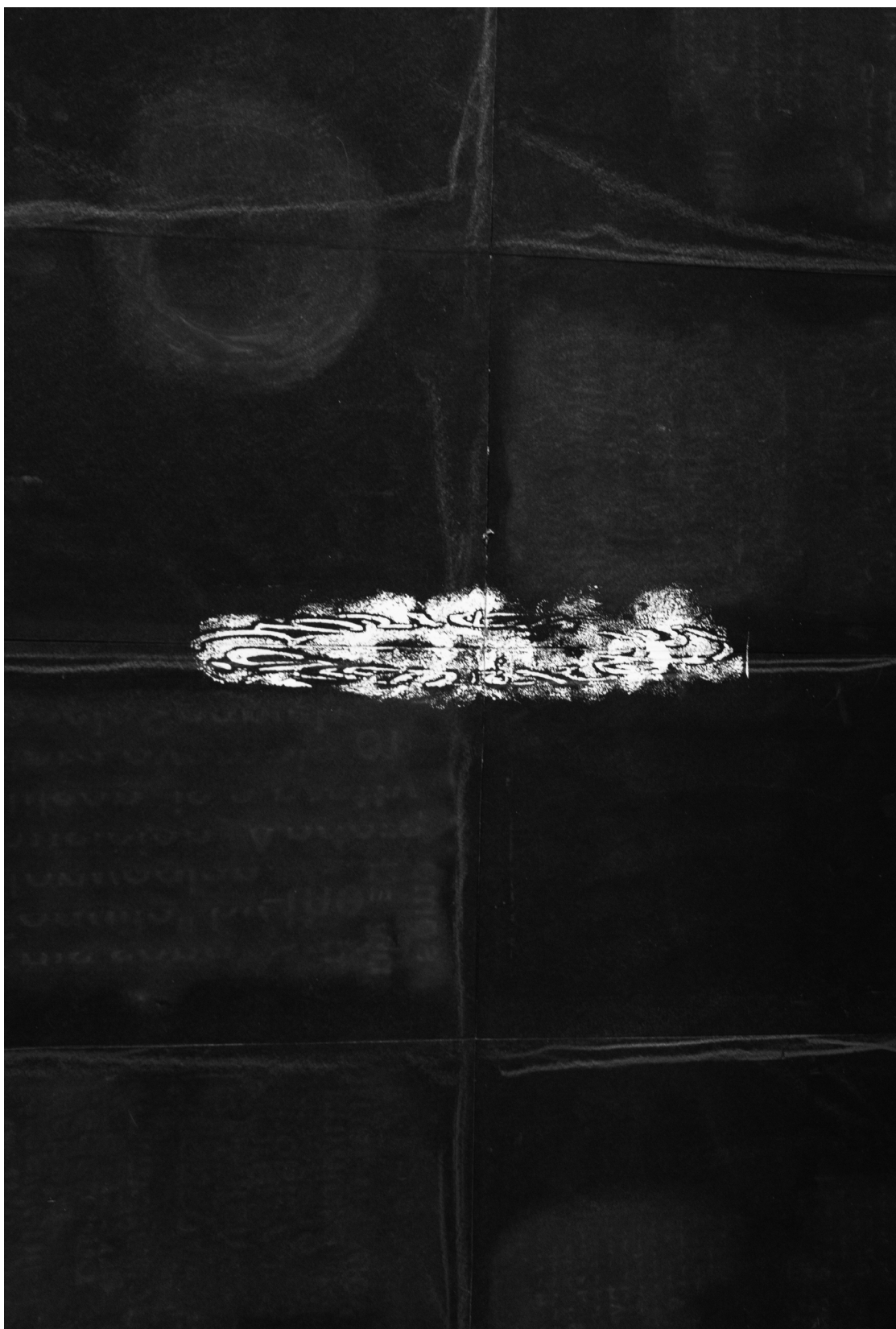


Fig. 28. Angélica Mota Gamboa, (detail) *Illiterate zine*, –November, 2019

6.7 Project 7: Not a Racist Book

Not a Racist Book is a project that uses Mock-*Nahuatl* as an inspiration and foundation to analyze language usage in Mexican social media. This project was initiated from the collection of memes which use Mock *Nahuatl* and Derogatory Ethnic Labels (DEL). DEL's are a form of mockery used to diminish Indigenous people. Examples of denigrating popular utterances are: "*Indio pata rajada—Cara de olmeca—Indio bajado del cerro a tamborasos—se te nota el nopal en la cara—pinche naco—eres un indio*," which translate to "Barefoot, Olmec-faced Indian, summoned from the hill with a drum, people can see where you're from just by looking at you, tacky motherfucker, you're an Indian". These utterances are commonly used on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and in daily conversation. In addition, memes, tweets and stickers used in WhatsApp conversations that consist of using Mock *Nahuatl* also informed this data collection.

When analyzing this data I found that the majority of the content for these memes was more than just a mock of Indigenous people and languages. In the use of this "creative language," the purposeful misspelling of words in either English or Spanish is only a reinforcement of stereotypes produced by the humorous undertones associated with the intertextual media. The use of Mock -*Nahuatl* in memes generates a prejudiced underlying discourse to which the majority of Mexican society is not aware. This is due to the fact that memes are considered "funny" and acknowledgment of the implied racist discourse does not fathom the viewer. Mexican Indigenous memes that make use of Mock-*Nahuatl* are representative of a "covert racist discourse" and Hill (2008) states that negative stereotypes cannot be collected without a discourse. She "uses the term "discourse" as shorthand for "all the varieties of talk and text," within this term she includes the material presence, structure and content of language "in-use in history in a particular moment of interaction" (Hill, 2008), p.32). Hill suggests that it is important to analyze what is said and what is not said. In this particular case Mexican Indigenous memes contain a discourse that is not being said. They are more than just a "funny" text. Implied in the memes is a racist and discriminatory discourse.

According to Geneva Shmitherman-Donaldson and Teun A. van Dijk “the discursive reproduction of racism is the achievement of the dominant group at micro levels of everyday verbal interaction and communication” (Geneva & Teun, 1988, p.17) Therefore, Mexican Indigenous memes can be considered as a discriminatory discourse in a shape of humors intertextual media. I interpreted these micro levels of communication which were sourced from everyday social media posts, racist and discriminatory memes, tweets and DELs. The verbal and visual interaction, communication, and discourse generated by the mass media and social media against Indigenous people can be considered a discriminatory discourse in the shape of ‘humorous’ content. “It is just a joke,” “I was being ironic,” according to Navarrete (2017), these are utterances that people use after they have been criticized due to racist jokes. This contextual humor is used as a revalidation of discriminatory stereotypes.

Informed by this analysis I developed a bilingual instructional satirical booklet that contains Mexican memes which use Mock- *Nahuatl* as well as derogatory ethnic labels present in social media posts. Instructions on how to reinforce stereotypes without noticing are displayed on the first page as the instructions invite the user to reflect on the use of language found in memes which are shared and reproduced throughout the book. This instructional booklet was a visual response and a satirical reflection demonstrating the importance of the language and how it may be used to reinforce or generate stereotypes through social media. This booklet makes use of the “poor” and “ugly” typeface designed in Project Five to emphasize the sarcastic message. The typeface had been chosen due to its association with the concept of how design can be visually representative of stereotypes (Fig. 30,31, 32 & 33).

The desired outcome of this artifact was to function as encouragement for the user to self-reflect on language which is used in the content shared and produced as users of social media, while highlighting potential consequences. Editorial design conventions and techniques were used as a vehicle to spread a message which communicates: regardless of whether these memes or tweets are intended to be humorous, they remain harmful. There

is an unspoken message concealed in the content, which is directly tied to a racist and discriminatory discourse.

Not a Racist Book as my final piece makes use of all information, knowledge, and research obtained from previous projects; compounding all the knowledge into a single design artifact. Upon reflection on this work, I learned that through a merging of knowledge and visual projects I can visually express my research and generate new insights through experimentation with multiple formats. The design is intended not only to be consumed as a functional object, but also a piece which evokes critical thinking in regard to the content. Ideally it will make a connection with the readers daily behaviors of sharing and creating this type of content. The book comes to be a satirical instructional book which enters the consciousness of a reader.

One of the limits of this bilingual publication was that despite the fact that the translations were as close to the original meaning as they can be, it will be hard for non-Spanish speakers to fully understand the “joke” of the memes and utterances. This artifact could also be hard to grasp if the audience is unfamiliar with the rest of this thesis project or my inquiry in general. As following the cyclical design process this project promoted further questions such as: what is behind the discourse of mass and social media that is not been said? Why does Mexican society deny the fact that stereotypes constitute racist and discriminatory behavior toward Indigenous people? Why does Mexican society consider this social content as “funny” as opposed to racist?

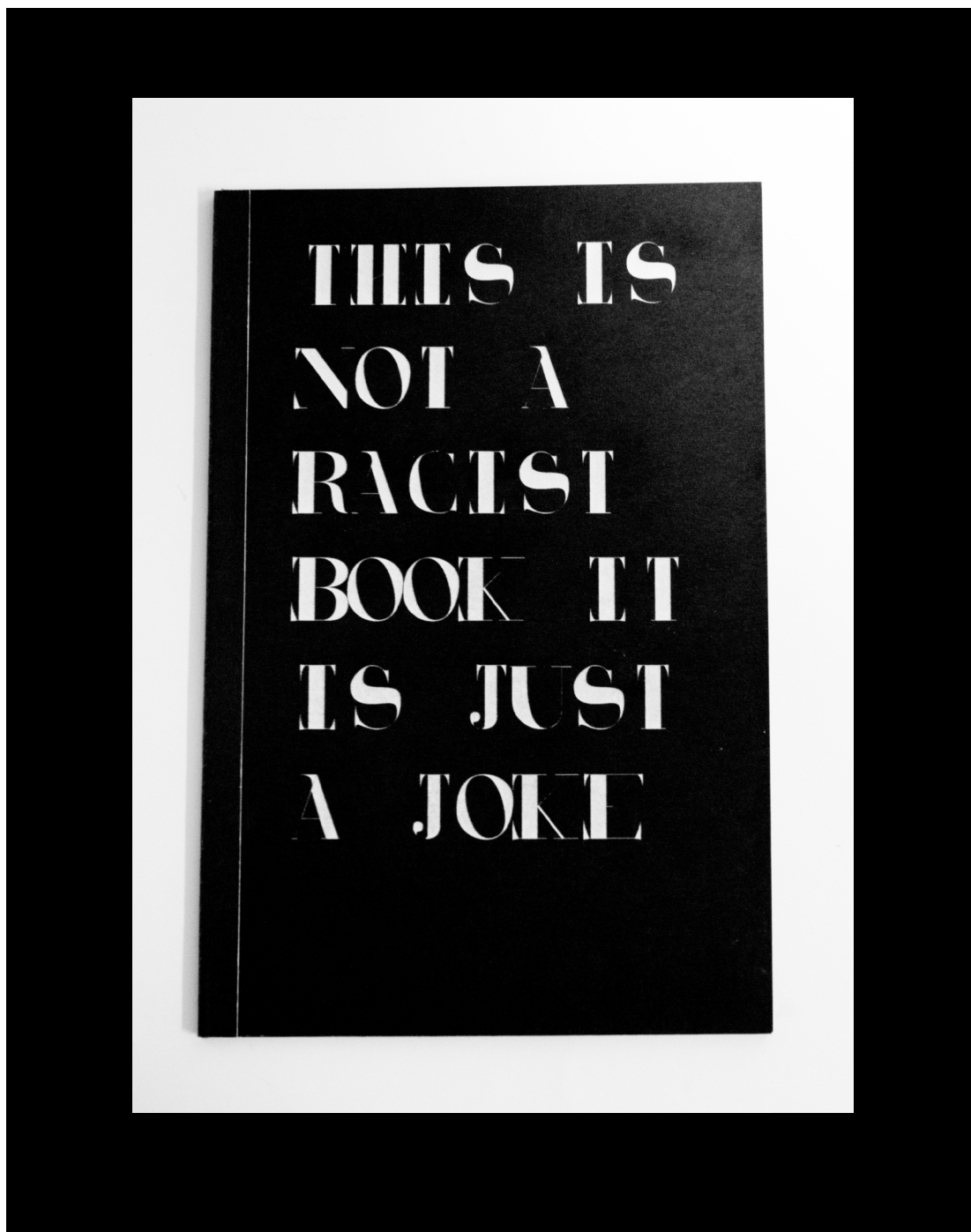


Fig. 30. Angélica Mota Gamboa, (detail) *Not a Racist Book*,—August 2019

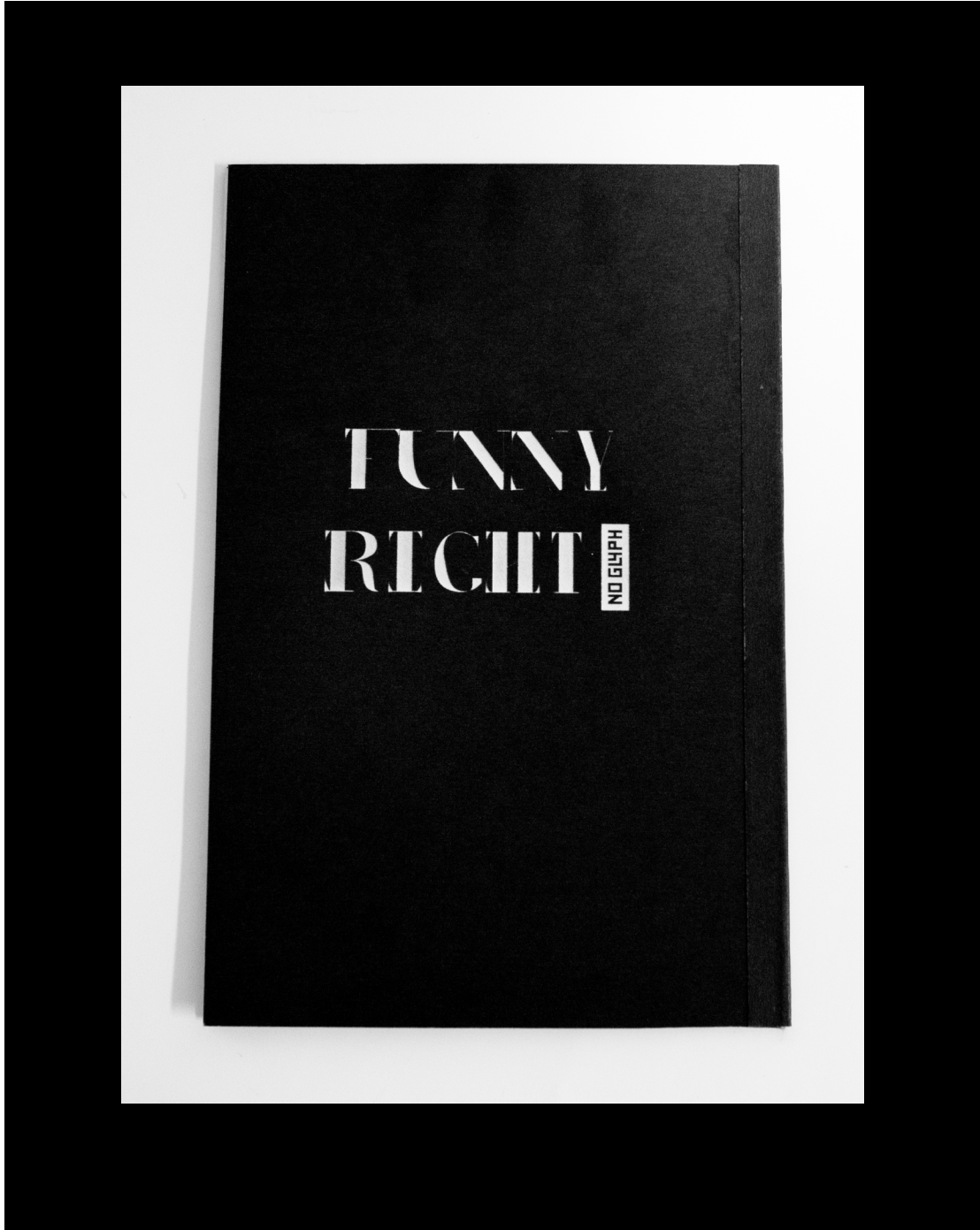


Fig. 31. Angélica Mota Gamboa, (detail) *Not a Racist Book*,—August 2019



Fig. 32. Angélica Mota Gamboa, (detail) *Not a Racist Book*,—August 2019



Fig. 33. Angélica Mota Gamboa, (detail) *Not a Racist Book*, –August 2019

Conclusion

Through this investigation, I visually responded to the negative portrayal of Mexican Indigenous people as represented by mass and social media in Mexico. The artifacts designed within this catalogue of work are reflective of the online visual materials that share perceptions of Indigenous people as illiterate, poor, ugly, naïve and lazy. The stereotypical representations that various mass and social media platforms use to describe identities of the Indigenous create and fuel widespread negative connotations. These perceptions are predicated on racist and discriminatory practices. The performativity of stereotypes through design demonstrated that language and the discourse produced in mass media and social media can be an important factor in generating racism and discrimination within Mexican society.

This research used a foundational model consisting of creative and research processes which combine practice-led research and research-led practice. This model served as a guide to develop a cyclical design process which directed a visual examination of social issues, such as the stereotyping of Indigenous people on mass and social media platforms. In this process I followed a system of data collection, the analysis of data using academic research, developing insights, visually responding to those insights, self-critiques of my visual outcomes, and the creation of more insights to inform my further inquiry. My design process produced visual outcomes consisting of valuable insights which visually embody my research. The intent of this thesis is to understand prevalent stereotypes in regard to Indigenous Mexican people through a design process. This cyclical design process is used in order to produce knowledge, facilitate research, and return to visual creation. All completed projects function as a response to those which precede them. Through research and artistic creation, the projects evolved linearly, revealing more about the thesis topic and uncovering inquisitive information which prompted new projects.

Although there are limits and challenges that arose with each project, each one contributed to the generation of insights to inform my future work. This thesis concludes that the formulated cyclical design process can be used as a tool for visual exploration in regard to social problems, as well work as a method for conducting academic research.

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